

THE ARGOSY.

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COLONEL FANE'S SECRET.

BY SYDNEY HODGES, AUTHOR OF "WHEN LEAVES WERE GREEN."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY.

MRS. KING'S announcement was so astounding that for a few moments Hugh failed to grasp it. That Vera should be even acquainted with Miss Carlyon seemed the wildest improbability, but that she should have lived on intimate terms with her and have actually gone away with her was absolutely incredible.

The page of his life's history which had recorded his connection with the actress, was one which he would gladly have blotted out. That the pure-minded Vera had been in any way connected with her was a shock for which he was not prepared. It seemed so utterly inexplicable. He felt that she must be in utter ignorance of the character of the woman with whom she was associated. It must be his task to rescue her at all costs.

He managed to collect himself sufficiently to put further questions.

"Do I understand that Miss Carlyon came here constantly?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; very often. They seemed almost always together."

"How long had Miss Fane known her?"

"Not many weeks, I think, sir. It was after she came back from Jersey."

"And you say she left with her?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you do not know where they went?"

"No, sir. Miss Fane did not seem to wish it to be known. She was in great trouble, as you may think. She said she should be most likely coming back some time or other, and that she had found some work."

"But did you not ask her to leave some address?"

"Yes, sir; but she said that she would be moving about from place to place, and that she would write."

"And did she write?"

"Yes. She sent me a short note saying she was getting on very well, and that I was not to worry about her."

"Did she give you no address then?"

"No; only Liverpool. She said she was leaving there almost at once."

A light suddenly dawned upon Hugh. He wondered it had not struck him before. She had evidently gone on the stage. He remembered the extraordinary talent she had displayed at Brighton. It was no doubt this that had thrown her into connection with Miss Carlyon. They had probably gone on tour together. It was an extraordinary combination of circumstances, but the more he thought about it the more he was convinced that this was the solution of the mystery. He turned again to Mrs. King.

"I am a very great friend of Miss Fane's," he said. "I wished very much to help her in her trouble, but I have only just returned from abroad. If you should hear from her, or hear anything of her, will you at once let me know at this address?"

He handed Mrs. King his card with the name of his hotel written on it; then he said:

"I should very much like to have some further particulars about her great trouble. It is not from mere curiosity I ask but from my desire to help Miss Fane."

"If you will please to step in, sir, I will tell you anything you wish to know. She needs friends, poor thing. I only wish she was here herself."

Hugh went in, and, seated in Vera's own room, listened with a sad heart to a detailed account of her terrible trials. What he felt as the startling facts were brought home to him here on the very spot may be easily imagined. In this very room her heart had been torn with an anguish almost indescribable, and the saddest fact of all was that there was not a single friend near to soothe and comfort her in her affliction, only this humble but kind-hearted woman, who was narrating the facts to him.

As he sat pondering on what he had heard a sudden thought struck him. He must secure some abode in London while he was prosecuting his inquiries. Why not these very rooms? They were not luxurious but they were comfortable enough, and after his rough experiences in the bush, he was not particular about trifles. There would also be the ever-present association with Vera. She may have sat in the very chair which he now occupied a hundred times—reclined on that couch—sat by that fireside, thinking perhaps of him. It would be some consolation, at any rate, to know that her dear presence haunted the very spot, and made it seem like sacred ground to him.

"Are your rooms vacant now, Mrs. King?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. The last party left ten days ago, and I have not been lucky enough to let since."

"I shall have to find rooms for myself, as I may be some time in town, or at least going to and fro. If you have no objection I will take your rooms."

"I shall be very glad, sir."

"And as you don't know me, you will probably want a reference, or at least payment in advance. I have not many friends in London, having been abroad several years, but I shall be glad to pay a week or two in advance."

"Oh, I am quite satisfied, sir. Besides, if you are a friend of Miss Fane's that is quite sufficient."

"But you have only my word for that," said Hugh, smiling.

"Well, sir, I don't want more. I know an honest face when I see it."

"We'll consider it settled, then. When can I come in?"

"As soon as you like, sir. I can get the bed aired at once."

"Then I will come to-morrow, and will probably send up some of my traps to-day."

"Very well, sir. Shall I get in anything for you?"

"Yes; you may get anything you think necessary. I am not particular as to what I eat and drink. Meanwhile, please take this on account."

He put some money in her hand and, bidding her good morning, left the house. Mrs. King looked after him as he strode away down the street.

"As nice a gentleman as I wish to see," she said. "Something more than a friend to Miss Fane, if I ain't mistaken. Ah, if he had only come before, what a blessing it would have been to her, poor child!"

Hugh elected to walk back to his hotel. He had a problem to solve which exercised his faculties to their utmost limits, and he wanted time to think. He had no cause to reproach himself for anything in connection with his former relations with Miss Grace Carlyon. At least, that was his impression. He had loved her with what was little more than a boyish love, and he had, as he thought, been cruelly deceived. He had therefore left her without compunction and in a state of indignation too violent to admit of his seeking an explanation. The indignation had long ago given place to indifference; but he had always considered himself an ill-used man, and was only too glad when the charm of Vera's face and manner came to fill the void that his former passion, which was sufficiently intense while it lasted, more of a youthful fancy than enduring love, had left in his mind.

It would be impossible to renew his intercourse with the actress, or even to make his presence in England known to her, but in no

other way did he see a possibility of ascertaining Vera's whereabouts. He was revolving this difficulty in his mind as he neared Paddington Station, and then a sudden thought struck him. He knew that the address of the principal actors and actresses were to be found in the *Era*, and seeking the bookstall of the station, he succeeded in securing a copy of that paper. Taking it to the waiting-room, he ran his eye over the advertisements on the first page. Presently he came to the familiar name, and read the announcement.

"MISS GRACE CARLYON,

"On tour in America with Mr. Watson Beale's Co. All communications to Mr. W. Challacombe, Theatrical Agent, 6, Bedford Street, Covent Garden, W.C."

Hugh's first thought on reading this was that nothing was to be gained from it, but it quickly occurred to him that the Mr. Challacombe referred to might have some information respecting Miss Fane—that is, if she had really gone on the stage. It was possible, too, that she might be advertising, though it hardly seemed likely. He searched eagerly through all the columns of advertisements in the hope of finding the much-loved name, but it was not to be seen. His next step, however, seemed clear, and hailing a hansom, he drove at once to the address of the agent named in the advertisement. On sending in his card he was ushered into a small office on the first floor, and found himself in the presence of a keen-eyed man of about forty, whose first impression evidently was that Hugh had come to seek an engagement.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "Pray take a seat."

"I see you are the agent for Miss Grace Carlyon," said Hugh.

"Yes; but she is at present touring in America."

"I know. It is about a friend of hers I wanted to see you—a Miss Fane—Vera Fane. Can you tell me where she is at present?"

"Never even heard the name. There is no such name in the profession that I am aware of."

"She was not in the company Miss Carlyon was in last Christmas, or soon after?"

"I think not. In fact I am sure she was not, or I must have heard of it."

"Have you a list of the company?"

"I am not sure. I may have; but I could not put my hand on it at this moment. I am, moreover, due at a rehearsal of a piece in which I am interested—which I am producing, in fact."

"I am most anxious to find the young lady. I am willing to pay liberally for any trouble I may give."

The magic word had the desired effect.

"If you will leave me your address I will see what I can do. You must excuse me now, I am overdue. But you shall hear from me as soon as possible."

Hugh was obliged to be content with this. He gave the address of his hotel and took his departure. He was scarcely outside the house, however, before it occurred to him that he might get some information from back numbers of the 'Era.' It was only a few minutes' walk to the office in Wellington Street, so he proceeded there at once and asked to be allowed to see a file of the paper.

He turned at once to the January dates and looked for Miss Carlyon's advertisement. In a few minutes he found it. It ran as follows—

"Miss Grace Carlyon on tour with Mr. Colborne's Co." Then followed the address of the agent as before.

A flood of light rushed in on Hugh's mind. Here was the explanation of Vera's disappearance. He knew how much Colborne thought of her acting. There could be little doubt that he had secured her for his company. Probably she was still with him. He hastily turned to a more recent number, and came upon a column headed "On the Road," which was simply a list of the various travelling companies. He ran his eye down it in vain; there was no further mention of Colborne's Company.

He turned back to the earlier numbers, and, after searching for some time, came upon the name of the company again, and saw that under that date they were at Bristol. Then he looked through the notices of performances in provincial towns, and presently hit upon a criticism of the company at Cardiff. There were glowing eulogiums of Grace Carlyon, and of two or three other prominent members of the company, but the name of Vera did not appear. He found some other criticisms, but still no mention of a Miss Fane. Quite at a loss how to proceed, he turned to one of the clerks and asked him if he knew the name in the profession. The clerk put the question to another and older man, but the latter shook his head.

"Never heard the name, sir," he said. "She is not on our advertising list."

Thoroughly nonplussed, Hugh left the office and returned to his hotel. After a hasty lunch, he started off for his sister's house in Evelyn Gardens. In answer to his inquiries he found the Lindsays were still abroad and had not written for some weeks. He secured their address and went back to the hotel, intending to write a long letter to his sister, in the vain hope that she might have heard something of Vera's movements.

All this time one thought sorely troubled him. Was this deadly silence on the part of Vera the result of her meeting with Grace Carlyon? Was it possible that she had learned the fact of his former connection with the actress and resented his having kept it a secret from her? In no other way could he account for her desire to keep even her address a secret. In no other way could he account for the absence of any desire to have her letters forwarded. That she must be highly incensed against him, or had grown utterly indifferent was

certain, and yet if he could only see her how easily could he have explained it all.

He felt utterly unhinged, for he seemed baffled at every turn. In his restless and unhappy state he went out into the entrance hall and began pacing up and down. Suddenly his eye lighted on a letter in the letter-rack addressed to himself. He took it out and opened it. It was from the theatrical agent, and ran as follows :

"DEAR SIR—I have found the list of Mr. Colborne's company and enclose you a copy. You will see it does not contain the name of Fane. You will see also that there was a Miss Violet Fenton in the company, and I hear that she was Miss Carlyon's understudy, and played her part very successfully in Dublin during Miss Carlyon's illness. She appears to have left the company very suddenly. I have no trace of her after Dublin. I shall be happy to assist you in any way I can.

"I am, dear sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"H. J. CHALLACOMBE."

A ray of hope flushed across Hugh's mind. Was it possible that Violet Fenton could be Vera Fane? The initials were the same, and nothing was more likely than that she should wish for many reasons to conceal her identity. Colborne, if he could be found, would be able to give him the information he required, and yet from an instinctive objection to the man he shrank from the thought of getting the information from him. However, he asked for a copy of the *Court Guide*, and searched for his name. It was not in the book, probably from the fact that the Hon. Tom was not a householder.

Again he felt baffled, but not defeated. There was still another course left. Why should he not run over to Dublin and see the manager at the theatre there? A very few questions would enable him to ascertain whether Miss Violet Fenton and Vera Fane were identical, and he might possibly get some clue there as to her present whereabouts.

This idea took such forcible possession of his mind that he could think of nothing else. He went back to the agent, and fortunately found him at the office as he was detained late at work. He stated his intention, and begged for an introduction to the Dublin manager. The agent evidently thought the suggested journey rather a wild-goose chase, but he gave the introduction.

"I hope you may be successful, Mr. Chetwode," he said dryly.

On his return to the hotel, Hugh sent a hasty note to Mrs. King, to say he should not be coming for a day or two. And at 8.20 the same evening he took his place in the Irish mail, en route for Dublin.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A REVELATION.

HUGH arrived in the Irish capital at a much too early hour to prosecute his inquiries at the theatre. Theatrical people, as a rule, are not renowned for early rising. In fact, they are often going to bed at about the time the rural population of our realm are getting up. After taking his breakfast at an hotel, therefore, there was nothing left for Hugh but to walk about the streets and amuse himself as well as his impatient state of mind would admit.

At about noon he presented himself at the stage-door of the theatre to the manager of which his letter of introduction was addressed. In answer to his inquiries, he was informed that the manager would not be likely to be there for another half hour. He therefore waited at the door so that he might not miss the chance of an interview.

Presently a burly man of fifty, or thereabouts, came hurrying in with an air of authority and an expression indicating that he was not in the best of tempers and that every one might look out for squalls. Hugh, however, was not to be daunted by looks; he concluded he was the manager, and at once addressed him.

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Tanner?" he asked.

"You have," said the manager with only the slightest possible brogue—stage culture having corrected any tendency that way which he might have originally possessed.

"Could you spare me a few minutes? I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to you from Mr. Challacombe."

"Well, I have never any minutes *to spare*," said the manager, with emphasis on the last words. "I have no vacancies at present, if it's an engagement you're after."

"No, indeed, it is not. I only want some information which it may be in your power to give me," answered Hugh, handing him the letter.

The manager opened it, and glanced over the contents.

"Will you come into my room," he said; "but I must ask you to be as brief as possible, for I am very busy."

Hugh followed him to a room up a flight of stairs to the right. The manager seated himself at a table, upon which were several letters and papers, and motioned Hugh to a chair.

"Now, sir, what is it?" he asked.

"You had Mr. Colborne's company here in June last, I believe?"

"Yes, and did very good business that week. I wish they had stayed longer."

"There was a Miss Violet Fenton in the company, I think?"

The manager seemed suddenly interested.

"There was," he said; "and an uncommonly queer thing happened—a horribly annoying thing, I may say."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Well, she had to take the part of the leading lady at very short notice, and she did it so well that if she had continued she would have drawn big houses; but she suddenly disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Disappeared. Played one night and then went clean off—heaven knows where. Never left a trace behind her."

"But for what reason?" exclaimed Hugh in utter amazement.

"That's best known to herself. I only know that it put us in a deuce of a fix. Miss Carlyon ill and nobody else to play the part. I thought we should have had to close the house. Grace Carlyon, however, very pluckily pulled herself together and struggled through."

"But can you form any idea of her motive in going, or where she went to? It is most important that I should find her—for her sake and my own."

"I don't mind saying, then, that it is my impression from Colborne's manner that she'd had some row with him. I don't know what terms they were on. He always seemed rather sweet on her. Any way, he was left in a pretty fix in consequence."

Hugh restrained his rising indignation. That there should be even a suspicion of impropriety in connection with Colborne was almost too much for him, but he would only defeat the end he had in view by noticing it.

"You have positively no clue as to where she went?"

"None whatever; but from Colborne's manner I suspect he knew more about it than he chose to tell. We think she must have left by the early boat. In fact, if I remember rightly Miss Carlyon inquired and found that a girl answering her description did cross that morning."

"I suppose you don't happen to know if she was playing under her real name?"

"It never occurred to me to ask. She was new to the profession, but had considerable ability. Of course, her pretty face was greatly in her favour. Audiences like a pretty face, especially Irish audiences."

"Would you mind describing her?"

"I'm not much of a hand at that. She had light hair and bluish eyes—fair complexion."

"Tall?"

"Well, over the middle height; just a nice height for the stage. The girl would have made a hit; in fact, she did. Are you a relative of hers?" he asked suddenly.

"No; but a young lady in whom I and others are much interested has suddenly disappeared, and we think she may have taken the name of Fenton, especially as she left town with Miss Carlyon. By the way, was she in mourning?"

"I'm inclined to think she was. Well, I must really get on with other matters. I hope you will be successful in finding her. There's no accounting for the freaks of romantic young girls."

"You don't happen to know where they lodged in Dublin, do you?" said Hugh, rising to go.

"No; but possibly the doorkeeper or some of the supers might know. You might inquire as you go out."

"Thank you, I will. I feel much indebted to you for what you have told me. By the way, I quite forgot to ask the date of that last performance of Miss Fenton's."

"Last week in January, I think. Let me see. It was on a Wednesday. Yes, it would have been the last Wednesday in January. We had Barrett's crowd here the week after."

"Thank you. Good morning. I must apologise for taking up so much of your time."

"Glad to have been of any use to you. If you are stopping here should be glad if you will look in to see the show to-night."

"Thanks very much, but I shall probably leave by this evening's boat. Good morning."

Hugh left the room and sought the doorkeeper in his little den. He had no notion where Miss Carlyon was staying; didn't know any one who would be likely to. Could give a list of the lodgings generally taken by the various travelling companies, but it would be a chance to hit on the right ones.

Hugh did not see that much would be gained even if he could find the rooms, but having nothing to do and being unwilling to lose a chance, he selected one or two addresses at random and hailing a car told the driver where to go.

As he went rattling over the stones at the quick trot peculiar to the Irish horses he pondered much on what he had heard. There could no longer be any doubt that the Miss Fenton in question was Vera, but why had she disappeared in this abrupt fashion? Could Colborne be at the bottom of it? The manager's remark made him fear that this was the solution of the mystery, but surely there must have been a very strong reason indeed for so gentle a nature as Vera's to take such a course, and to leave the company in such a plight. If it had been any sudden and unexpected news that called her away, the manager would have known; but she had evidently left without a word of explanation to anyone.

His cogitations were suddenly interrupted by the driver pulling up at a certain number in rather a shabby looking street. Hugh descended and rapped at the door. It was opened by a red-haired slovenly-looking maid, who stared at Hugh as if she had never encountered a gentleman before. He felt that this could not be the right place, but he put the question.

"Did you happen to be living here in January?"

"Indade I was, sorr," answered the girl, who was evidently astonished at the question.

"Do you remember if a Miss Carlyon was lodging here in the last week in January?"

"I never heard the name, sorr. It's myself would remember if anybody of the name had been here in the last six months."

"I have no doubt. I am sorry to have troubled you," said Hugh.

Remounting the car he showed his list of addresses to the driver and told him to go to the one which he considered to be in the most respectable quarter. The man took him through several streets to one in the neighbourhood of Merrion Square, and this time Hugh hit upon the very lodgings he was in search of. The house was kept by an Englishwoman, and in answer to his inquiries he was informed by the person who opened the door that Miss Carlyon and her friend had occupied the first floor during the last week in January. Hugh then asked to see the mistress, and when the door-opener—who herself seemed as much mistress as servant in the house—ushered him in, the landlady proved to be a pretty and sympathetic looking widow of about thirty.

Hugh at once explained that he was most anxious to obtain information respecting Miss Violet Fenton. That her sudden disappearance had caused her friends great anxiety, and that he thought by inquiring at her lodgings he might obtain some clue to her whereabouts. The landlady, Mrs. Moore, at once displayed much interest in the subject of his inquiries.

"Of course I remember the young lady perfectly," she said. "Her sudden disappearance caused us all the greatest distress, for though she was here such a short time, her sweet manner made us all take a great fancy to her. Poor Miss Carlyon was almost heart-broken when she found she had gone away like that."

"Can you form any idea why she did it?"

"Well, sir, I have my own opinion about the matter, but I don't know whether I ought to say it to a stranger. Are you a relation of Miss Fenton?"

"No; but when I tell you I had looked forward to making her my wife—and that I have come all the way from Australia for that purpose—you may imagine how deep an interest I have in finding her."

"Is that so? I am indeed sorry for you, sir. Then I will tell you all I know. You may have heard that Miss Fenton had taken Miss Carlyon's part that night, as Miss Carlyon had lost her voice."

"Yes, I have heard that."

"Well, sir, a gentleman called on hearing this to secure Miss Fenton's services. Miss Fenton had a key, so I did not sit up, but as I always like to be sure that all is right before I go to sleep, I left my bed-room door open. Miss Carlyon's sitting-room was on the first-floor and my bed-room door was just at the top of the second flight of stairs. I heard Miss Fenton come in rather later than usual

and I heard a man's voice also as they came up the stairs. I was rather surprised at this, as Miss Fenton was a very quiet young lady, and it seemed strange that a gentleman should come home with her at that time of night. They went into the sitting-room and closed the door as they entered, so that I could hear nothing more—at least for the time."

"And what happened then?" asked Hugh, with intense eagerness.

"There was silence for a few minutes," pursued the landlady. "I thought they might be having supper, but suddenly I heard their voices again, and Miss Fenton began speaking in a very excited way, but I could not catch the words. Presently the door of the room was thrown violently open, and Miss Fenton exclaimed, in a loud voice: 'This is cruel, cowardly! If you will not leave me I must call for help!'"

"As I suspected," said Hugh, in a voice hoarse with anger.

"I remember the words very distinctly, for I was quite startled. The gentleman seemed to be further in the room, for I could not catch his words, and he was speaking in a low voice, as if afraid of being overheard. By this time I had got up and put some things on, for I thought I might have to go down, but in a few minutes I heard him again, quite distinctly, for he must have come out on the landing. He said: 'I will leave you now, but remember, whatever happens, I shall love you still!' Then he said good-night, and went down the stairs, and I heard him go out and close the hall-door behind him."

"And then?" asked Hugh, so burning with indignation that he could hardly control his voice.

"Then there was silence for a long time, but presently I heard Miss Fenton again faintly talking to herself and moaning as if in great distress. I did not know what to do. Now that the gentleman was gone I thought it would be better for me not to know anything about it. I thought Miss Fenton might be hurt if she knew anyone had overheard. By-and-by I heard her go softly into Miss Carlyon's room, and soon after I heard her coming up to her own room. I quietly closed my door that she might not think I had heard anything. She went on into her room and shut the door. Then I thought it was all right and that it would be no good my interfering, so, being very tired, I went back to bed and soon fell asleep, but you may think how dreadfully annoyed with myself I was in the morning when I found that the poor thing was gone."

Hugh's breast was in a tumult of conflicting emotions, the most tender pity for his lost love, the most violent indignation against her persecutor.

"Have you any idea who the man was?" he at length asked.

"Yes, I have," answered the widow with some hesitation, "but it is dangerous at times to speak even the truth."

"You will be safe with me. I need never reveal the name of my informant. Besides, you must see, considering my relations with Miss

Fenton, how very important it is for me to know. I might be suspecting an innocent man, for I confess I have my suspicions."

"Then I had better say exactly what I think. I believe it to have been Mr. Colborne, the manager. I let him in once or twice when he came to see Miss Carlyon, and I recognised his voice."

"This is precisely what I suspected—the scoundrel. Mrs. Moore, you have done me a very great service in telling me the truth; I shall now know what course to pursue. Now tell me, was there no communication from Miss Fenton after she left?"

"No, only the note she left for Miss Carlyon. Of course, the company only stayed a few days, so I have no idea what happened after."

"But you made inquiries at the time?"

"Yes, we ascertained that a young lady answering the description of Miss Fenton left by the morning boat, but where she went, of course we don't know."

"And what became of her things? I presume she did not take them with her?"

"No; she took only a small bag. Miss Carlyon packed all her things and sent them on to her own rooms in London, thinking she would hear from her friend. I don't know if she ever did."

"Miss Carlyon is in America. I fear it is not likely, she has heard, as other, much older friends of Miss Fenton's have not. Well, I must not keep you any longer. I feel very deeply indebted to you, for what you have told me. Good-morning."

He held out his hand. The widow took it somewhat timidly.

"I should so like to know if you get any intelligence of her," she said.

"I will be sure to let you know, but I confess that at present I feel quite at sea. It is a grievous matter altogether. By the way, I forgot to ask you. Did you tell Miss Carlyon what you had overheard?"

"Yes. She was in such a state of mind, poor thing, that I thought I had better."

"And did she also suspect Mr. Colborne?"

"I couldn't say. She never told me if she did, but he did not come here after."

"Then I conclude she did. Well, good-bye. You have done me a great service."

He returned to the car and drove back to his hotel. The same evening he set out on his return journey to London.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

As the boat left the pier that night and steamed out into the bay a glory of the moon arose out of the east and cast a broad track of glistening silver over the waters of the Irish Channel. The mystery of the night lulled the waves into an enchanted sleep which it seemed a desecration to break even by the slightest whisper. The voiceless air was so flooded with moonlight that only the larger stars were visible, and the creamy foam of the steamer's wake curled and wreathed far behind as bright almost as at broad noon. The dim line of the Wicklow Mountains melted into the vaporous grey of the southern sky, and the long line of the Kingstown lights shimmered down the unruffled waters nearer the shore, fringing them as with willows of golden light.

In spite of the rough life he had led abroad Hugh was still deeply impressionable. The glory of the night fell upon his heart like a magician's spell, stilling even the painful tumult which the events of the day had awakened in his breast, and bringing his mind into a train of thought which enabled him to piece together the various items he had gathered up in his recent interviews.

Of one thing he felt morally certain. In some way Vera must have learned the secret of his former connection with Grace Carlyon, and only learned half the truth. In no other way could he account for her hiding her whereabouts even from the man she had professed to love so devotedly. He could no longer doubt either that it must have been Colborne's unwelcome advances which had caused her to leave Dublin so suddenly. The words which Mrs. Moore had overheard were almost overwhelming evidence that he had even insulted her, and Hugh's frame quivered with indignation as he reflected on this and pondered over the best means of bringing condign punishment on the offender. Of course, he exaggerated the offence and put the worst construction on it.

"The coward," he muttered in his rage, "to take advantage of her defenceless position to shower insults upon her. Any man with even a grain of feeling would have respected her recent sorrow and have done his best to shield her, not to insult her. Oh, my poor darling! Why have you not trusted me? If you had only waited a little while what misery you would have been spared!"

He was too restless to go below. He paced the deck smoking for hours, and looking over the vast expanse of water so bright in the intense lustre of the moon. Will the marvels of science ever enable us to tell what is being done at any special moment by loved ones at a distance? As Hugh gazed on the face of the moon, which has been man's familiar friend for countless ages, how little he knew that

at that precise moment Vera was gazing at the self-same orb from the observatory at Halton! Through all the intervening space their glances met within the bright circle of glory, but no voice was there to reveal the fact. Far beyond all echoes of the earth the white-robed maiden pursued her lonely path, silent and inscrutable, like God Himself.

On arriving at Holyhead Hugh settled himself into the corner of a first-class carriage, and as the train rushed across Anglesea and past the mountains of Penmaenmawr he snatched a few hours' sleep. An early breakfast at the Euston Hotel freshened him up, and he drove at once to his sister's house to ascertain if there was any news of her. To his great delight he was told that the Lindsays were coming home the following week. As soon as he was likely to find the theatrical agent at his office he bent his steps thither, and found, much to his gratification, that he had arrived.

It was not his intention to make known all he had heard in Dublin. It was too sacred a subject. He merely stated that his interview with the manager had convinced him that Miss Fenton was the young lady he was endeavouring to find, and that he wished now to find Mr. Colborne.

"I cannot see his name in the 'Court Guide.' Can you give me his address?" said Hugh.

"Under the changed conditions I should say he was probably at his father's place in Hampshire," answered the agent.

"What changed conditions?" asked Hugh.

"The death of his brother, Viscount Burnham. You have not been reading the papers evidently. His brother died almost suddenly a fortnight ago. He is now the heir to the title. If he has returned from Nice, where he was summoned to his brother's deathbed, he is in all probability with his father at Seagrove Hall."

"This is news indeed, but I am nevertheless anxious to see him. Where is Seagrove Hall?"

"Kirkfield is the station, I think; in fact, I am sure it is. I have been in the neighbourhood often, but never actually at the house."

"Thanks. That will be sufficient, no doubt. Meanwhile, if you should get any intelligence of Miss Fenton you will let me know at once."

"Certainly; but I confess I do not think it likely."

Hugh said good morning and returned to his hotel. His mind was soon made up. He packed a small valise, and two hours later was in the Bournemouth express speeding on his way towards Kirkfield.

On reaching his destination, Hugh ascertained that the distance to Seagrove Hall was about four miles. He therefore chartered a conveyance, and, leaving his bag in the cloak-room, started for the Hall.

He had but a vague idea as to the course he would pursue even

if he succeeded in obtaining an interview with the new Viscount. He was still burning with indignation at the thought of the insult this man had offered to Vera; at the same time he was desirous of getting all the information he could with regard to her present whereabouts. He felt therefore that he must be guided by events. If he failed in getting any information, the only thing left was to put the matter into the hands of a private detective, and to advertise in the papers; but for many reasons he wished to avoid this course. In the first place, he disliked the idea of publicity in connection with Vera, and, in the next, he knew that she must have some very strong motive for concealing her whereabouts, and, as far as he could, he wished to respect that motive. On the other hand, he felt that, if he could once meet her, things would very soon be set right. He could not bring himself to believe that she had ceased to love him—that idea was too painful to be entertained for a moment. No, there must clearly have been some misrepresentation to bring about the present state of things.

In little more than half an hour, they entered the broad avenue of elms leading to Seagrove Hall. The mansion itself was situated on somewhat rising ground with a terrace in front looking over a wide stretch of park dotted with some magnificent oaks. Beyond the park an undulating, thickly-wooded country stretched away towards the New Forest, the woods of which lay like a dark purple haze in the extreme distance.

On arriving at the house, Hugh descended from the trap, and, mounting the steps to the ample porch, rang the bell.

A grave-looking servant came in response to his summons, and in answer to Hugh's inquiry, said that Lord Burnham was at home, but was not seeing any visitors at present.

"In fact, his lordship is not very well himself, sir," he said.

"It is on particular business I wish to see him," said Hugh. "He will probably remember my name if you take in my card. If not, say I am a friend of Mrs. Fortescue."

"Yes, sir," answered the servant. "Will you please to come this way, sir?"

Hugh followed him across the hall to a room that looked like a study. It was almost surrounded by book-cases containing all the old standard works in the gilt leather bindings of a past age. In the centre was a huge writing-table with innumerable pigeon-holes and drawers at the back, and upon it piles of papers, letters, circulars, memoranda, and all that pertains to the busy life and responsibilities of a county magnate.

Hugh had only time to glance at these things when the door opened and he turned to find himself face to face with Lord Burnham. He could not help being struck with the alteration in his face—he looked ten years older than when Hugh had seen him last. The cheeks had fallen in, the complexion was unusually pallid,

and even to Hugh's unpractised eye there were symptoms of the fell disease which had carried off his elder brother. Of course the recent trouble the family had gone through, the hurried journey, the bringing home of the body, and the interment in the family vault had all told upon a constitution never over robust.

Although he came forward with outstretched hand, there was a look in his face which conveyed the idea that he would much have preferred not being intruded on at such a time.

Hugh stood erect, and made no response to his advances. Lord Burnham dropped his hand in surprise, and there was a moment of silence. Then Hugh said:

"I have come on no pleasant errand, Lord Burnham. I cannot meet you as a friend unless I can get satisfactory answers to certain questions, which I must beg leave to put to you."

Lord Burnham drew himself up somewhat haughtily.

"I am quite at a loss to imagine how I can have been so unfortunate as to offend you," he said, with a slight touch of irony in his tone. "I was anticipating a friendly visit. We parted very good friends. I have had some painful experiences lately, and am by no means disposed to enter upon any fresh ones. Be good enough to let me know your grievance, if indeed it is a grievance."

He motioned his visitor to a seat, but Hugh remained standing. Lord Burnham, however, sank into an easy chair beside the writing-table with a look of weariness and impatience. In spite of his assumed indifference, he had an unpleasant suspicion that Hugh's visit was connected with Vera, and he was on his guard. Not for a moment would he admit that he had made advances to a humble member of his company and been refused.

Hugh plunged at once into his subject; he was not one to beat about the bush, and he was not, moreover, in the mood.

"You had Miss Fane in the company you took out last Christmas, under the name of Violet Fenton?"

"I had," said Lord Burnham, taking up a paper-knife and making small impressions with it on the blotting paper as if the question was of no importance.

"I have ascertained that she left your company quite suddenly," Hugh went on. "I wish to ask you why she did so?"

"I must ask you in return why you expect me to explain Miss Fane or any other woman's motives? They are generally too inscrutable."

"Because I have the strongest reasons for believing that it was your conduct which drove her to this sudden flight; which has driven her to hide herself from all her friends ever since."

"Indeed," answered Lord Burnham, putting down the paper-knife; "you seem to know more of my business than I know myself. Will you be good enough to state your grounds for this extraordinary assertion?"

"Can you deny that you accompanied her home to her lodgings at a late hour the last night she was with you, in fact after the rest of the household had retired? Was this a proper course to pursue towards an innocent girl? You must have seen that you compromised her by such a course. Considering the trouble she has gone through and her forlorn condition, if you had possessed a spark of honourable feeling you would have shielded her good name."

An angry flush passed over Lord Burnham's cheek.

"These are strong words, sir," he said. "I utterly fail to see why I should listen to them, or by what right you take upon yourself to lecture me."

"By this right," answered Hugh with growing anger. "Miss Fane had promised to be my wife, and would in all probability by this time have been my wife, but for you."

"I fail to see the connection of ideas," said Lord Burnham. "If she had intended to marry you why did she cut herself from all her friends when she joined my company? Why did she change her name? Why did she wish to conceal even her whereabouts, as I happen to know she did?"

"She may have had motives for this quite apart from our engagement. But this does not excuse your having insulted her."

"Gently, gently. You let your temper carry you away. You forget that I am in no way bound to answer you; but as I can appreciate the smart which you must be feeling from the apparent fickleness of the young lady in question, I may tell you that I was obliged to see her home that night."

"Obliged!"

"Yes, obliged. She had been seriously ill after the piece—fainted on the stage in fact. I had to take her home in a cab. I could not let her go alone. It would have been brutal. Miss Carlyon, her friend, was seriously ill also. I went in to inquire how she was. I found she had gone to bed."

"And finding that, you made use of the opportunity to insult an innocent girl."

"By heavens, sir, you shall apologise to me for this!" said Lord Burnham rising. "What do you mean by daring to bring such an accusation against me?"

He knew from Hugh's own words that he had not seen Vera, and he knew that no other person could have told him what took place that night. He therefore felt bold in his denial. Hugh went on.

"I bring the charge against you because it is true. You are trying to deceive me now and you shall answer for it. Your very words were overheard. I know as a fact that she flew to the door and dared you to approach her under the threat of rousing the house. Can you deny it?"

For a moment Lord Burnham was struck dumb. How could these facts have become known? He was utterly at a loss to conceive,

and yet they were true in every particular. He was too good an actor however, to betray himself. A bright idea flashed across his mind. He burst into a laugh.

"This is too good a joke," he exclaimed. "Was your informant really taken in? Her acting must have been true to the life."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Hugh, astonished in his turn.

"Mean?—but you must really excuse my laughing; it is too ludicrous. I mean, that Miss Carlyon having gone to bed, I took the opportunity of running through a little bit of a new piece with Miss Fane which required very careful rehearsing. Ha, ha, ha! To think that our innocent rehearsal should have roused all this indignation! It almost passes belief. How careful one ought to be!"

Hugh was staggered. If this were really true he had done Lord Burnham a grievous injustice. But in some way the words did not ring true. Still he felt bound to give him the benefit of the doubt.

"If what you say is true, and I admit there is some plausibility about it, why did Miss Fane leave you in that abrupt fashion the next morning—I may say the very same night? It is to the last degree improbable that anything should have occurred after you left her to justify such a course."

"I don't know that. She was strangely agitated all the afternoon. There must have been something—something between her and Miss Carlyon; otherwise"—and here another idea came to his aid—"she would not have kept her whereabouts a secret from Miss Carlyon as well as from me. Grace solemnly assured me that she had not the remotest idea where she was. She worried herself frightfully about it."

Hugh was compelled to admit to himself that this might possibly be true. Had the revelation with regard to his former connection with the actress taken place on the evening in question? and if so, would it not have been sufficient to account for Vera's sudden flight? He was bewildered by these conflicting ideas, as well as by the thought that he might have done Lord Burnham an injustice.

The latter saw his advantage and followed it up.

"It is useless prolonging this interview," he said. "You have used words which I cannot overlook. I am in no state either of mind or body to bandy more words with you. I am sorry I consented to see you. The next time you think of bringing forward such accusations it would be as well to make sure of your facts."

Hugh took up his hat. He was baffled, but not convinced.

"If I have done you an injustice," he said, "I regret it extremely. When I find Miss Fane—and find her I will—I shall know the truth. I will not trouble you any longer now. Good evening, Lord Burnham."

He turned to leave the room. The cynical smile came back to Lord Burnham's face. His words had a fine touch of irony.

"I fear our relations are too strained for me to offer you the hospitalities of Seagrove Hall, but as it is getting late I should be glad to know if you have a carriage waiting, or if I can send you back."

Hugh writhed under the covert irony, but the doubt as to whether he had done this man an injustice was still strong on him.

"Thank you," he answered coldly. "I have a trap waiting. I need not trouble you. Good evening."

Lord Burnham rang the bell. The butler appeared in the hall and preceded Hugh to the cab, closing the door after him. Burnham listened till he heard the wheels, then he sank on a couch, his face white, his lips quivering.

"That was the hardest piece of acting I have ever gone through," he said, "and to think that the cause of it all should be within a stone's throw, as it were. He cannot have the least idea where she is, or he would have seen her first. The worst thing for me now would be for them to meet. It must be my business to keep them apart. I do not choose to let all the world hear of my rebuff, especially now things are changed."

Meanwhile Hugh was being driven rapidly back to the hotel. The evening had fallen, and thick clouds were driving up from the southwest, foretelling a coming storm. Hugh was, however, too deeply lost in thought to notice external objects. He felt that he had been beaten, but there was also the inner consciousness amounting almost to a conviction that it was the triumph of deceit over honesty. He seemed baffled at every step. It was weary work, but still he must go on. He resolved to take the last train back to town if there was still time. He put the question to the driver.

"I doubt if you can catch the 7.40, sir," the man answered. "That's the last one up to-night. That's a queer light over there, sir," he added, pointing with his whip away to the right. "Looks like a fire."

Hugh turned his gaze in the direction indicated. Above a dark belt of pines there was a red light, which, catching the edges of the heavy clouds, lit them up with a lurid glow.

"It is evidently a fire of some sort," answered Hugh. "Are there houses in that direction?"

"There is a village a little more to the right, but that light seems to be in the direction of Halton Hall. However, it may be only a bonfire or burning weeds, or something of that sort."

A rising bank and some woods bordering the road soon shut out the light, and the matter passed from Hugh's mind. He alighted from the trap on arriving at the hotel, as he found it was too late for the train to town. There was nothing for it but to remain the night, though inaction under the circumstances was most distasteful to him. He ordered some dinner, and took up the local paper to endeavour to divert his already overstrained thoughts.

Suddenly his ear was caught by the sound of a horse going at a furious pace past the hotel. Then he heard shouts outside and the noise of feet hurrying along the passages of the hotel. He listened a moment. The commotion seemed to increase, and, wondering what it meant, he went out into the hall.

The landlord was at the door surrounded by a group of men and women all talking excitedly. Hugh joined them and inquired what was the matter.

"A very serious matter indeed, sir," the landlord replied. "Halton Hall is on fire. A man has just ridden in to fetch the engines. It's a bad look out. It's at least two miles away. It may be burnt out before they get there."

"Then that was the red light I saw as I came back. Who does the place belong to?"

"Mr. Bates, sir."

Hugh had heard Bates speak of his place in Hampshire when they were in Jersey together. He suddenly remembered it.

"You don't mean Mr. Bates the well-known geologist, do you?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know about his geology," answered the landlord, "but I know he's got a big telescope and is an F.R.S. or something of that sort."

"Good heavens! You don't say so," exclaimed Hugh. "I know him quite well. I may be of use. Let me have a trap at once."

"There's one coming round. I'm going out myself. You can go with me; it'll save time. Ha! here comes the fire-brigade. They have been pretty sharp. I trust they may be in time."

Hugh hurried back to his room, thrust himself into a rough ulster, and put on a close-fitting cap. Then he seized a flask and a pair of thick gloves, and hurrying downstairs again, found the landlord and his son fully equipped and the trap at the door.

"Now, sir, jump in. There's not a moment to lose if we're to do any good," said the landlord.

Hugh sprang in, followed by the other two. The landlord looked up to the man on the box.

"Drive like mad," he said. "Be there as soon as the fire-engine and there's five shillings for you."

(To be continued.)

SHOES AND SHIPS.

I.

IN these days of anthologies why does no one compile an anthology of dreams? Not only are curious examples to be met with in almost all the lives and autobiographies of famous men and women, but an enterprising editor might send a circular round to our living celebrities, tenderly demanding of them some specimen or two of their nocturnal visions. One can fancy the sort of answers some of them would give.

Many dreams have become part and parcel of literature and of their dreamer's personality. Such was that famous recurrent one of President Lincoln which preceded most of his life-tragedies, including his assassination. Dean Stanley's dream of his instalment as Pope of Rome has become classical, and the dream of Dante's son, Jacobo di Dante, in which the mighty poet appeared to him "clad in very white raiment, his face shining with unaccustomed light," whom he asked if he was living, and heard from him the reply, "Yes, but in the true life, not yours!"

Dryden was inclined to estimate a man's poetical quality by his dreams. Charles Lamb regretfully acknowledged that his were never worth the telling. Longfellow records some pleasant ones. "I had a dream last night of meeting Tennyson at an hotel in some Italian town. He was elegantly dressed, and had the easy manners of a man of the world. He said he was going to the opera." Again, "Last night I dreamed of Emerson. He said, 'The spring will come again, but shall we see it, or only the eternal spring up there?' lifting both his hands on high." This last was an autumn dream. Both were toward the end of Longfellow's life. Dean Swift records some characteristically stormy dreams. "I walked on the rocks in the evening, and then went to bed and dreamt that I had got twenty falls from my horse," is one of them.

It was in his old age, and in illness, that Tennyson, as we read in his memoir, dreamt that he was Pope of the whole world, and weighted down by all its sins and miseries. His most famous dream is, of course, that which occurred on the eve of his being offered the Laureateship, that the Prince Consort kissed him on the cheek. On which Tennyson commented in his dream, "Very kind, but very German."

Cowper was eloquent on his dreams. In one of them he had a glorious interview with Milton; and in another our first father, Adam,

appeared to him, his mighty physique arousing feelings of mingled envy and admiration in the frail poet.

Dickens raises the question as to whether writers of fiction ever dream of their own creations, confessing that he himself never did, nor could even fancy the possibility of anyone doing so. His dreams, however, seem to have partaken of the character of his waking work. He dreamt one night, he told Fields in a letter, that a friend, he didn't know who, was dead, and the news was broken to him very delicately by a gentleman in a cocked hat, top-boots, and a sheet. "But we must all die, Mr. Dickens, sooner or later, my dear sir," said this gentleman by way of comfort. "But what did he die of?" asked Dickens. This question broke the gentleman altogether down, and he answered with a flood of tears, "He christened his youngest child, sir, with a toasting-fork!" on which Dickens, more affected, he says, than he had ever been in his life before, wrung his visitor's hand in a convulsion of respectful admiration.

Southey was a great dreamer. His earliest remembered dream in infancy was of the devil, a dream to which the slumbers of childhood are strangely enough more subject than those of "grown-ups." Later on he set great store by his dreams, utilising them in his poems. One of the wildest scenes in "*Kehama*" was thus inspired. To this source of inspiration also was due a weird episode in R. L. Stevenson's story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which, indeed, gave rise to the book. Such a dreamy-natured man was Coleridge that there can scarcely be any hard-and-fast line drawn between his sleeping and his waking visions. It was in anodyne-induced slumbers that the poem rose entire before his mind, of which only the fascinating fragment known as *Kubla Khan* has been preserved. For, after his awaking, as he was eagerly taking down the successive images which with their corresponding expressions the sleep-god had provided him with, he was called away from his delightful task by some inexorable "person on business," and on returning, found that, as happened on a memorable occasion to King Nebuchadnezzar, the thing had gone from him.

Southey recalls Sharpe's oft-quoted story of the poet Mickle who lamenting one morning, as he was prone to do, that the sublime verses he composed in sleep should be lost to him for ever, was brought down from the clouds by his good wife. The poet's dream-verses having on that occasion been spoken aloud, she had dutifully treasured up for him the last lines which ran—

"By Heaven, I'll wreak my woes,
Upon the cowslip and the pale primrose."

One would like to know if the suggestions of great pictures are apt to come to their authors in sleep. The dreams of artists seem to be of a character peculiar to themselves. "Alas!" exclaims Albert Dürer, "how often I see in my sleep great works of art and excellent

things, such as never appear to me when I am awake, and as soon as sleep leaves me I lose the memory of them."

Haydon records several of his dreams. In one Michael Angelo visited him in his painting-room. Haydon confronted the mighty Florentine with a portrait he happened to have of him, pleasantly remarking, "It's very like, but I do not think your nose so much broken as I had imagined."

General Moltke, his nephew says, was very averse to tales about the fulfilment of dreams. "Several times he has told me that he dreamt one night in the beginning of the sixties that he was ascending a ladder, but that he fell down every time he tried to reach the sixty-sixth step. He never spoke about this dream till after the year 1866, and then he remarked in telling it that if he had died in the year named and the dream had been known everybody would have taken it as a prophecy." Moore tells a foreboding dream of his own, with its fulfilment, which he calls "having his dream *out*."

II.

Do the Americans or the English speak the best English? That it should actually have come to this, that our juniors across the water dispute with us the superiority in the use of our own tongue! Well may we say that wonders will never cease! Time was when brother Jonathan had to swallow as best he might the sneers of British travellers at his drawl, his nasal twang, the misplacement of his emphasis and vowels, and other verbal eccentricities. We have now to bear something of the same at his hands, but we can afford to do so with agreeable calmness. Scarcely can we take up a Transatlantic journal without coming across some jibe on our pronunciation of the commonest words. An American in London, writing in the *New York Times*, is very much exercised in his mind at the Cockney mode of speech. He heard a woman in an underground train demand of her husband, "Charley, is this the lawst trine?" and Charley's answer (should it not have been Chawley?), "Ow naw!" He entered a bar-room, and, instead of the customary "glaws of hale," fixed himself some Yankee drink, whereat the landlord respectfully inquired, "Might I awsk you, sir, what part of America you come from, sir?" He saw two boys fighting, and one of them called out to a girl with a baby in her arms, "Tike the biby awy!" But then this is not *English* any more than the American twang and pronunciation are *English*.

Of course all these cockneyisms are matter for our own humorists. Though it is alarming to find Professor Skeat writing in the *Review of Reviews* (June, 1897), that, since "familiarity leads to imitation, and imitation to adoption, it is a tolerably safe prediction that such a pronunciation will one day be general." Time was, says the Professor, when the pronunciation of *lady* as *lydy*, with other words of the same vowel sound, was quite unknown to him. But surely some

of our older authors were familiar with its use, and introduced it into their dialect sketches, only with another spelling—*laidy*. It was, perhaps, Mr. Barry Pain who brought the present more catchy version into vogue, with his story of "The Dead Biby," and others in which it is used with such effect.

But the question remains, does the average Yankee speak better English than the average Englishman? The American working-man, at any rate, or so a friend tells me, judging from his own experience, does certainly talk the language more correctly than his English confrère, and sneering allusions are common amongst his class as to the incapacity of the newly-landed Britisher to speak his own tongue. But then no one pretends that the English working-man speaks pure and perfect English; the accent is as much out of his power to acquire as it is out of the power of the American. Some years ago, during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, my informant entered a labourer's tent in the Rocky Mountains in which were two men, one being the cook who prepared him his supper. On its coming out that he was from the Mother country, the cook, a superior sort of man, exclaimed, "Why, you speak good English! Now, there's an Englishman in our camp, and I can hardly make out a word he says."

Longfellow tells of an English visitor who puzzled him by saying he was "*very tarred*," the poet only catching his meaning on the expression being repeated. It was not that the stranger had been subjected to the peculiarly national ordeal of being tarred and feathered. He was only tired. Longfellow also, with his little daughters, made merry over the jolly captain of an English steamer whom they overheard calling out, "Steward, some *beah*! I'm dying for some *beah*!"

An Anglo-American lady of our acquaintance entered a grocer's shop in a provincial town in England, and asked for a pound of butter. The shopman looked civilly puzzled. He had evidently never been asked for such a thing before. The lady had a bright thought. She was familiar with some of the insular peculiarities of speech. "A pound of buttah," she ventured. "Oh, *buttah*!" and the enlightened grocer at once supplied her want. The same lady was momentarily puzzled on her own part by being offered a "*farr*" one chilly morning by her thoughtful landlady.

Now, the Americans are certainly free from all such lingual eccentricities, and they never misplace their aspirates. The truth is that the best speakers of English, speak it with the same accent, or rather, want of accent. But it is by no means every cultivated American whose speech is indistinguishable from his British confrères. Hawthorne's daughter relates that when he was in England, it was said of him—as a compliment, she explains—that he would be taken for an Englishman, until he spoke. Lowell was humorously indignant on being asked by a Scot, in admiration of the American's unyankified speech, "where he had got his English," and retorted in

a well-known verse of an old ballad that he had got it by right of birth. We find him wondering, some years later, how a little grandson of his own had acquired a nasal drawl. May it not also have been by right of birth?

III.

MOST of us have occasionally regretted that we cannot possibly have any personal intercourse with those who, through their writings, have most appealed to us, that they must for ever remain among the persons we would wish to have known.

Let us comfort ourselves with the reflection that in some respects we may become better acquainted with the objects of these regrets than the friends who ate and spake in their company; that we may be able to pierce to recesses of their mind and character unknown to those with whom they were in actual intercourse.

"My heart has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to it," says Hazlitt. But he often lets it speak to his readers, and claims their sympathy in return. In coming across such outpourings of confidence in him and others, the revealing of some hidden trait, some secret thought, the confession of some unsuspected weakness we think: "His own household most likely were not aware of that, but *we* know of it!"

In a biography a man's whole life, from beginning to end, lies before us. We can make allowances that his most intimate acquaintance could not always make. When Swift is bitter, and insolent, and sarcastic, we say to ourselves, "Poor Swift! more mad than bad, more suffering than insufferable. He uttered those scurrilities no doubt to relieve a bursting brain, a breaking heart." We can see him threatening his own image in a mirror—as he did in his old age—more fiercely than ever he threatened any other opponent. And our only wonder is that he was so good. The line that divides sanity from insanity is often very thin. And it is difficult for those in the tumult of intercourse with a passionate nature to make allowance for what seems strange in its manifestations. We, who can study the self-communings of such natures at our leisure, who know of their regrets, their struggles, their aspirations, can generally forgive all because we know so much.

Which of their friends knew Lamb, or Johnson, or perhaps even Carlyle, now that all is told, quite so well as we do? Indeed, it was Hazlitt's remarks on Elia in "The Spirit of the Age," that just now suggested this train of reflection. "He is shy, sensitive, the reverse of everything coarse, vulgar, obtrusive, and commonplace. He would fain shuffle off this mortal coil."

Now we, who know Lamb from first to last, though only by his

writings and by hearsay, know very well that this "mortal coil," slight and transparent though it was in his case, stuck very close to Lamb's ethereal spirit, that he was particularly loath to shuffle it off; far more so in fact than many men of twice his flesh. That he clung in a quite peculiar manner to the material accessories of life; so much so, indeed, as to lead some ultra-refined people (kind-hearted Miss Mitford was one of them) to set him down as "coarse." That in his glorious path of self-denial he gratefully partook of whatever little earthly pleasures fell to his lot, and would fain have carried not only his fleshly coil, but all his mundane belongings with him into Heaven.

It is often only one side of a man's character that he exhibits to one friend, and a different side to another. The students of his life and works can see all sides, get a more vivid glimpse into his inner being and arrive at a shrewder estimate of his character than could ever those around him. An author has confidants among his posthumous friends such as he never had in his lifetime. The nights of aching and waking, the drowsy "drumly" hours, the cares and griefs against which Sir Walter Scott had to struggle in his daily work and which are so lightly noted in his diaries, were no doubt often utterly unsuspected by those for whom he bore so brave a front at the time. It makes one feel in better conceit with oneself to enter thus into the confidence of a noble mind.

"Not e'en the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh,"

says Keble. But a man will tell to those among the public who are able to read between the lines what he would not tell even to his nearest and dearest. And it is often the most reserved and reticent in private life that are most prone to these revelations of character in their writings.

What a world of innocent self-disclosure is contained in Lamb's casual, half playful yet, one can feel, wholly genuine remark: "The greatest pleasure I know is to do a good action by stealth, and to have it found out by accident." Strangely enough, it is the very fate that has overtaken him.

Bulwer was right when he said: "Authors are the only men we really do know; the rest of mankind die with only the surface of their character understood."

P. W. ROOSE.

A CURSE OF THE COUNTRY.

BY ERNEST G. HENHAM.

I.

NEAR the outskirts of a bluff which lay across the summit of a slight undulation of the prairie, a party of six took their ease where the influence of the mosquito smudges could best be felt. Half an hour before they had numbered five, four men and a young woman; then another man, tired and travel-stained, had lounged up through the rank grass, and came upon them suddenly with a hint for some edible refreshment.

"Join in with the crowd," said Talbot the leader, a young fair man, agent for that district to the Indian Department. His companions were old High Bluff, the well-known poker player, beautiful and smiling Rosalie, sister of Louis Hudon, that dark Canadian himself, and young Flett, a student in medicine who was going to marry Rosalie as soon as the party reached Fort Qu' Appelle, where they were expected, and where there was a mission and a priest.

"Thank you," said the stranger with some heartiness, as he settled himself beneath the welcome shield of the smoke which spread in a rolling canopy between the heads of the campers, and the omnivorous cloud of mosquitoes. "If anyone would oblige me now with tobacco and a match——"

The articles came to him at once, before he had time to finish the list of his wants.

He was a weary-looking man of medium height, with thin brown beard, and a pair of intellectual eyes; his hands were well-shaped and refined. It was evident that he was well-trained—perhaps had been a gentleman once. The prairie is a wonderful leveller of class distinctions.

"What's your line?" asked Talbot with the familiarity of the country.

The man smiled a little, and splintered a match. "Unskilled labourer you might call me. The farmers generally set their dogs on me for a tramp. It doesn't matter to me what they think, anyhow."

"I've no use for tramps. They're useless brutes," said young Flett to Rosalie, and she assented with a smile.

High Bluff took his pipe from his mouth, and pointed the stem towards the man.

"How long have you been at it?" he demanded.

"What? Living?" asked the man with some humour.

"No. Tramping, I mean."

"Say four years," said the tramp, chopping at the tobacco.

"Guess you want to take life easy—see the country a bit, eh?"

"Call it a roving disposition," came the answer.

"I know you chaps well enough," said the big man complacently.

"You were born tired; you wouldn't try to get work, and you wouldn't take it if it was fairly shoved on you with both hands."

"Maybe you're right," said the tramp.

"When do you mean to work again, anyhow?"

The tramp looked round with tired eyes, and saw Rosalie looking at him with contempt writ large on every line of her pretty proud face. He gave a short sigh, and then said defiantly:

"Never!"

"It's chaps like you that bring discredit on this country," said High Bluff frankly, as he returned the pipe to his mouth.

The tramp raised himself on his elbow, and asked, in a clear voice, not altogether in keeping with his unkempt appearance:

"What may be your profession?"

"Poker player."

"Professional gambler, eh? You make your living out of a game of chance."

The big man's face grew red.

"Chance you call it! If you can bluff over an acepot with a bob-tailed flush against three queens, you come pretty strong on the chance racket, I reckon. My profession wants skill, and iots of it. *I'm* not an idle tramp. My name's High Bluff, known from here to the Rockies, and don't you forget it."

The others laughed, but the tramp smoked on quietly.

"You go round the camps with your cards and your chips. I hang around the prairie for what I can pick up. Who does the hardest work, do you reckon?"

"What d'ye mean?" cried the big man. "D'ye mean to insult——"

"Stop it, Bluff," said Talbot, lazily. "No row here."

"If it weren't for the lady here, I'd punch holes in his rough head."

"You're right. It is rough," said the tramp coolly. "I was only drawing a distinction between the business man and the gentleman of leisure. I won't push the comparison any further."

"*Ma foi!*" muttered Hudon into the leader's ear. "The man talks well, my friend. *Mais!* he's no vagabond, or I mistake."

"Gentleman loafer. They're the curse of the country. Likely enough there's a warrant out for him in the old country."

Hudon turned slowly, and spoke in his imperfect English:

"Where you going, my friend?"

"Anywhere. It comes the same to me."

"And where you come from?"

The tramp smiled, fumbled with his belt, and finally produced a fair-sized buckskin bag which was full and heavy.

"That's his food for the next month," sneered High Bluff.

"You're not quite accurate. I can guarantee myself food for over the month," said the tramp quietly.

He took off his old felt hat, placed it between his knees, then turned into it the contents of the bag. A cry of envy and astonishment uprose, as every eye watched the golden cataract descend in a shower of light.

"Holy Moses!" cried High Bluff, rising to his knees, and staring spell-bound into the hat. "Why, it's a fortune, man! Where did you find it?"

"I never work," answered the tramp, with a slight note of sarcasm. "Still I can do a little prospecting at times, as I go about. Perhaps you are not aware that one result of my wanderings has shown me that there is gold to be found in this country, from the Pacific to the Rockies, and from the forty-ninth parallel to the Arctic Ocean. This particular gold comes from an unknown region, on the shores of the Mackenzie River, some three hundred miles east by north of Rampart House."

He poured back the bright stream of nuggets, and again concealed the bag about his person.

"Some men have the luck," said Talbot.

"You're right. We folks might go away north, and dig and wash for a twelvemonth, and never find a speck of dust. A lazy tramp, that walks along with his eyes half shut, stumbles across whole chunks of gold lying at his feet," grumbled the gambler.

"A chance for you, my friend," suggested Hudon.

"That's what. See here, boy; I'll play you for what you like."

"Where's your pile?" asked the tramp unmoved, turning the laughter against his challenger.

"I'm good enough. Any here'll tell you that."

"You're sure of winning, eh? I guess you would. Well, I'll be throwing the stuff away anyhow, but I don't somehow reckon that it will be thrown in your direction."

"He's afraid of chancing it," muttered Flett.

"I can't quite make him out," said Rosalie. "He puzzles me."

"He's not what he looks, dear. I shouldn't be surprised if he hadn't been a gentleman once."

Croak! croak! croak!

On a half-dead tree, at the extreme outskirts of the bluff, sat side by side six great vultures, the scavengers of the prairie, with black folded wings and necks outstretched. These had circled in the air for hours, narrowing down and down towards the ground, with their dismal cries calling each other to the feast. They had come on silent wings; had made no sound until the fitting time, when they had

sighted the quarry. They made no movement as they clung to the branch, and looked down upon the party.

"*Ciel!*" cried Hudon. "Look at the foul creatures!"

There was no need for the remark, as nobody could look anywhere else. The tramp rose and went outside the dark circle of smoke. He came back rubbing his face and red with heat.

"The mosquitoes are bad outside," said Flett.

"Bother the mosquitoes! I don't mind them. Maybe they have killed a few men before this, but it's not them we've got to fear now."

"What is it?" asked Talbot, struggling to his feet.

The heat was frightful—a dense close mantle of electric waves that wrapped the body in an embrace of fire. It had arisen very suddenly. Merely passing the hands across the hair produced a miniature storm of electric sparks.

"It's a sweltering oven we're in," said High Bluff.

"Be quiet," said the tramp. "Listen!"

The sky was cloudless. The grass was green and thick, but absolutely without motion. There was no quiver of the tall marigold and tiger-lily heads, nor was there sign of animation in the delicate fan-like foliage of the poplars. The heat-rays shimmered and streamed in steam-like folds. Over the entire prairie rested a perfect, unbroken, and illimitable silence, where the hurried breathing of the six human beings, and the snorting of the horses hard by, caused an unnatural disturbance. Suddenly there was tumult. It was only a great locust, that rose whirring from the grass, fell ominously into one of the smudges and was immediately calcined.

"*Voyez!* The six vultures!" said Hudon.

"One for each of us," added Talbot grimly.

They sat there, gaunt and silent, on the naked bough. The surrounding prairie could have brought them no taint of death. There was no broken-down horse about to die. The human beings below were well and strong. Yet they were waiting—waiting untiringly. The ghastly scavengers sat there with every living thing under their eyes. It resembled the ceaseless watch that is kept over the criminal who has been condemned to death.

Rosalie crouched against her *fiaké* in her fright, and began to sob.

"What is it, Alfred? Oh, take care of me." But the young man was shivering.

The tramp again disappeared energetically through the smoke. When he returned his face was pale, but the eyes were bright and keen.

"Get to the horses—quick! You've no time to lose."

They all sprang up excitedly.

"What is it? An electric storm?"

This combined shout raised a fearful troop of echoes out of the surrounding silence.

"Pshaw!" said the tramp. "Hurry, can't you? There's a lady with you, too. It's no good trying to race it, for it's coming up fast. We can't get outside, for it's a wide belt. Fling the bridles on."

"A tornado?" cried High Bluff, panting through the thick smoke.

"Worse—a cyclone. Fasten those lines as you go along."

They darted to and fro through that fearful heat. The horses were hurriedly brought inside the smoke and there saddled.

They all mounted except one, who remained on foot. It was only the tramp.

"There's a big dug-out, on the way side of a hill two miles north, straight as a line," he cried in a breath. "That'll shelter you if you reach it."

"How about you?" called Talbot. The tramp shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll take my chance as usual. The cyclone ought to carry me a few hundred miles without trouble or expense. I may be damaged freight at the end of the journey, but that can't be helped."

"Get up with me," said the leader. "No—that won't do. I'm heavy. You must ride with Rosalie."

The tramp caught a glance at the girl's face at this suggestion.

"Mademoiselle would rather not ride with a tramp," he answered a trifle bitterly. "Go on, sirs, and good luck to you. There's not a minute to be thrown away."

"No—no. I did not mean that," said Rosalie. "I should be glad if you would ride with me."

The invitation was not cordial, but time was precious, and no man throws away his life lightly. The tramp sprang into the saddle in front of the girl, took the reins, and started off with the manner of an expert horseman. The others swept along on either side. The six vultures rose simultaneously from the dead bough and followed.

The horses raced along through the great silence, the intense heat, and the clouds of insects. Not a word was spoken for some time. The animals sometimes snorted with pain when the great "bull-dogs" bit them. The horse that carried Rosalie and the tramp dropped some distance in the rear, while just behind them the six gaunt birds flapped along grimly with their dark dreary wings.

A mile had been covered, when the girl discovered suddenly that she was becoming interested in the man before her. He was a tramp, and therefore repelling. Still he was certainly no fool, for had he not warned them of the impending danger, and was he not even now saving their lives by guiding them along the path of the approaching destroyer to a place of shelter?

She perceived the ease and grace with which he rode the horse, avoiding the rough hillocks and the badger holes; she saw how uncomfortably he had settled himself in order that she might be more at ease. His neckcloth had slipped down a little, and disclosed a singularly clear skin; his hair was brown and wavy—it would have

looked nice had it been properly trimmed. Sometimes he half turned, to cast a glance behind, and then she noticed the fine-cut outline of a strong chin beneath the short beard; she saw the numerous small lines round his eyes; and began to reflect that this man had seen a great deal of trouble in the comparatively few years of his life. His eyes were soft, pleasant, and full of intellect. Attired in the garb of civilisation he would have presented a handsome figure, and made more than a passable lover. She began to pity him. It was too bad that he was only a tramp.

She looked ahead and saw that her *fiancé* was leading, by virtue of his horse. He was a rough and clumsy rider, and possessed none of the skill and grace of the man before her. It was fortunate after all, that she had not ridden with him, or they might have been left hopelessly behind. She was annoyed to see that he was selfishly considering only his own safety; he never once spared a glance behind to see where she might be, and whether she were travelling safely with her doubtful companion. In less than a week if they came safely to the Fort, she would be married. She began to wonder, now that it was obviously too late, whether she really cared for him as a wife should care for her husband.

The tramp was looking round constantly, but he never glanced at her. He did not seem to be aware that there was a pretty girl riding behind him, and holding to him for protection. She began to feel hurt. He might take a little notice of her, she thought, just from motives of ordinary politeness.

She moved her position slightly and shifted her hands. The tramp moved also, a little further away.

"It's all right," she said.

"Are you comfortable? Have you room?" he asked without turning.

"Yes," she replied. "But I'm sure you haven't."

"I'm used to queer positions on horseback."

"You've ridden a good deal, then?"

"All my life nearly. And many a steeplechase in former days."

He knew that this would mean nothing to her, because she was a Canadian. There was a short silence. Then she continued:

"The mosquitoes are biting your neck dreadfully. Shall I pull up your neckcloth?"

"Thank you. But I don't feel them in this excitement."

He felt the next instant soft fingers at his neck, and it sent a thrill through him. It was several years since he had felt the touch of a woman's hand, and it made him feel strong again, and think that there was still something left in life. He turned again, not this time to mark the rising cyclone, and his face was rather pale. He smiled, and she flushed, though she did not know why. But he had a very nice smile.

"Thank you," he said again, but far more graciously.

"I wish these birds would not follow," she said, to divert his attention from herself.

"It is only their nature. They know, far better than I do, that the cyclone is coming, so they follow the instinct which tells them that it must pass over us. Don't think about them."

"But won't they be killed themselves?"

The tramp laughed.

"That is the curious part. The instinct that tells them most things doesn't warn them of danger to themselves. Likely enough they will."

There was another interval of silence, which Rosalie broke with the remark: "I had hard thoughts of you at first—and now I am sorry."

He did not look round. "It was natural enough—I am only a stranger. And a tramp," he concluded.

"No, there is no excuse for me. You have saved our lives."

"Not yet," he said, with attempted cheerfulness. "Don't talk of it, Miss—Miss Rosalie. You have more than made amends for—Get up," he shouted, as the horse stumbled heavily over a badger hole.

The girl's heart beat faster, for every woman, single or engaged, loves a little romance. She began to wish that her affianced lover was more like this man in some things: strong-minded, capable of taking command, and of guiding others.

A strange whispering sound like a distant hiss came across the stifling atmosphere. It grew louder and closer. The tramp looked back again, but this time he took no notice at all of Rosalie's eager, highly-coloured face. His eyes were fixed sternly, while fear—more for others than for himself, the girl thought—began to make them dark.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "Are we in danger?"

"Yes," he said shortly. "Great danger." Then he compressed his lips, and began to ride fiercely.

The girl clung to him with both arms. She turned her head and looked behind.

"See! What's that?"

Afar off, where sky and prairie met, was an ink-dark spot, which might have been compared to a bruise upon white skin. A hand would have covered it, but, even as she looked, it grew larger and more black, rising like the cloud that follows an explosion.

Suddenly it came shooting up from the plain, lengthening and writhing terribly, like a dreadful livid serpent.

II.

"WHAT is it?" cried Rosalie, trembling, with white lips.

"The cyclone," said the tramp, bending forward over the neck of the horse.

"How far are we from the dug-out?"

"Nearly half a mile, I reckon. We shan't do it. They will."

He spoke the words which seemed to be a death sentence as though he did not greatly care for himself, whether it was to be life or not. After a moment he added: "I am sorry for you if we can't find a hole somewhere. For you're young and happy. I'm young, too, but—well, life's worth more to you than to me."

The other four riders were far ahead, dipped down as he spoke, and disappeared. When they came up the other side Talbot half reined in, and held up his hand in a mute question. The tramp understood, and violently signalled him to proceed. They could do no good by returning, unless they were able, by a miracle, to hold back the oncoming cyclone. Flett was riding far away, a dim frightened figure clinging to his horse with desperation. Then came Hudon, with many a backward lingering glance in his sister's direction. Last of all appeared the big form of High Bluff, sitting squarely on his horse, and riding with the careless abandon of the habitual gambler who feels that the cards are against him.

The tramp cast up his hand, and pointed towards a thick, rising patch of bush. "That's the hill. They can't miss the dug-out. The young fellow leading will be safe in less than three minutes."

By way of reply Rosalie burst into tears.

"Don't move," said the tramp, almost roughly. "Lean forward; we've got to help the horse."

"He doesn't think anything of me," she sobbed, as she watched the foremost figure disappear.

The tramp took no notice. He cut the horse sharply across the flank with the leathern thong. Rosalie leaned against him, and clutched him tightly with both small hands.

"Tell me how it's going. I can't afford to look back now."

The living serpent was mounting up and spreading, but had stopped its writhing. The dull monotonous hiss grew louder, like the sound of steam escaping from a valve. The heat was as great as ever.

"It is getting larger," she said. "It is spreading over the whole width of the valley."

The horse stumbled, staggered, then galloped again. The inky cloud ascended through the pure whiteness of the sky, until it stood like a great wall, while the girl watched and trembled. All around everything was as quiet as the grave. The birds had

disappeared with the exception of the faithfully following vultures; the trees, so soon to be destroyed, stood erect and motionless; the flowers never even nodded. Only a few locusts whirled here and there, and countless legions of mosquitoes tortured the beings who were fleeing from the destroying wonder of nature.

Rosalie parted her pale lips in a gasp of fear.

"What is it? Has it changed again?"

The cloud had decidedly altered. From a curious, and apparently harmless mass of vapour, it had converted itself into a solid-looking body of a most menacing appearance.

"It is whirling round and round. Look, it is awful!"

"May God help us! It is going to make its rush!"

He pulled the horse off towards the left, where the spur of the long hill began to rise. "So soon as it stops whirling I'll wish you good-bye," he said quietly. "Unless we are under shelter before then."

The cloud still whirled—faster and faster.

She clung to him like a child, with now and again a great sobbing sigh. "What is it going to do?"

"That whirl is getting up its impetus," he said grimly. "It will grow faster, stop suddenly, then the cloud will swoop across the valley in a ten-mile streak, and wipe out everything."

"Haven't we a chance? It is so dreadful to die like this."

The tramp pulled the horse yet more round. Then two of the vultures detached themselves from the main body, and followed heavily. The other four kept straight on.

"The mutes are attending to their duty," muttered the tramp to himself.

"Where are we going to?"

"There was a German colony here once. That explains the presence of the big dug-out further up, where I guess the others are safe by this time. There must be more of them about the place, if we're only lucky enough to strike one."

"And if we don't?"

"The cyclone will strike us—there's no way out of it."

"It's so awful to die suddenly," she said with a shudder, and closing her eyes. "Will it be very—very——"

"No," he said, guessing at her meaning. "You'll just feel a shock, one heavy blow that will stun you, and all will be over. Only God knows where our bodies will be carried."

His manner and voice changed in a moment. "Get up!" he shouted, and struck the jaded horse again and again. "Get up!"

"What is it?" she murmured, in a low frightened voice. He did not hear, so she repeated the question.

"Is that you? I thought it was the hissing of the cyclone. Don't hope, we've no business to hope. But do you see that?"

A dark hole in the midst of a sloping green wall met her gaze.

"Don't hope," cried her companion again. "It may be a blank. How is the cloud?"

"It is larger, and whirling faster."

"That can't last more than two minutes." The tired horse was almost down, but he pulled him up with a strong trained hand, and belaboured the foam-flecked flanks again. "It's hard to be cruel to a horse," he muttered, but Rosalie heard and liked him the better for it. Then he pulled up very suddenly.

The hole was not three feet high. Rosalie literally fell from the saddle into his arms. As she did so the cloud stopped its wild revolutions—stopped absolutely, with a startling suddenness. The two vultures settled on a tree.

He forced the girl through the aperture, and cried to her: "Is there room?"

She panted in that choking atmosphere. "There's just room, but it's very small. Come in! Oh, come in quickly."

"Poor horse," said the tramp, his kindly eyes growing moist. "Good horse! Dear horse! You have done everything for us, and now we must leave you to die."

He stooped and kissed the soft nostrils. "Come in!" cried Rosalie in a choking voice.

He crept in on hands and knees. There was barely space for the two. The horse came and stood before the hole.

"Have we any chance?"

"I think so."

"You've been very good to me," she murmured.

He stretched his head from the aperture and looked. The hissing had ceased abruptly, and there was a great and wonderful calm. A line of tall trees stood along the horizon. As he gazed upon them, without a sound, with extraordinary suddenness, apparently without the least resistance, they all disappeared. In like manner a bluff ahead was erased—silently and entirely. A dismantled shanty stood out on the open prairie. Like a gigantic locust it leapt into the air, came to pieces, and vanished. A great tree stood by itself. With the greatest simplicity, though without any apparent cause, with no signs of any reluctance, it came quietly up, roots and all, shot like a huge missile upward, and departed—where to no man might tell. Then a poplar bluff about five hundred yards distant became eliminated. All this magical work was accomplished in the midst of a perfect calm.

The tramp turned and caught Rosalie in his arms when that silence became disturbed. He placed her against the sand wall, and interposed his own body between hers and the aperture; she put her frightened hands upon his shoulders, and felt stronger because he was so calm.

"In case the hill caves in—good-bye," he said solemnly.

There was the rush of a cannon-ball, as the irresistible might of

the wind wave came sweeping along the valley, and black night settled down over that portion of the prairie.

"Don't say good-bye like that," she said. "I have been very unkind to you."

Her lips were very close to his; no man in such a position could have resisted that temptation, especially the man who had been cut apart from women for years. He kissed her as the cyclone struck the hill, and had they been killed by that awful shock, they would have met their death there together.

There was a frightful moan—weird and awful; there was a roar and a crash. It was darker than the blackest midnight, while a breath of wind passed along that was like ice. A grim crushing and grinding uprose, as Nature destroyed her beauty with her power. Then the crashing became a dim roar, the roar changed to a groan, the groan finally dwindled into a distant hiss, while the darkness began to slowly drift away. The cyclone had passed.

Four men crept out of the dug-out, some distance further up the hill, that a short time before had been covered with verdant bush, but now stood utterly bare, divested of every leaf and twig. They stood and stared with pale faces, and rubbing at their eyes as though they had just been aroused from sleep. Then they looked around, and wondered, for the entire face of the prairie had been changed into a wilderness.

Where were the horses, the bluffs, and the trees? There was nothing—not a living or dead thing—in sight. Where the vultures? They had vanished. With a power which would have shaken the loftiest mountain to its roots, with a mighty snatching hand that would have rent the greatest tree clear of the soil, with a charge that would have crumbled the grandest building into dust, the cyclone had destroyed everything, or had hurled it away upon its black wings. Nothing had escaped; nothing but the short grass had been left behind. Not a fragment of bark or splinter of tree rested upon the clean-swept prairie—not even a leaf or a twig could be found. More striking still, not even a single specimen of the many millions of insects, that a few minutes before had been a torment, could now be seen. It was as though chaos had come again.

"We've escaped, Talbot. I tell you I never looked to hold five cards again," said High Bluff, pulling out his pipe.

"We did it—only just did it," said the leader. "If it hadn't been for the tramp—" and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I'll have a good word for those chaps now. I thought he was one of the poor miserable sort, but he'd more grit than the crowd of us. If he hadn't put in his word, we'd have been wiped out."

The other two stood near with pale faces. Each had something to think upon, and somebody to mourn. Young Flett could scarcely stand.

"Shall we search?" said Hudon. "Is it any good, do you think?"
"I'm sorry, Alf, my boy. I'm sorry for you, Louis," said Talbot.
"Rosalie was a fine girl, and we were all proud of her. It's too bad, but you can't blame the tramp. He did what he could, and he's gone as well."

"If she'd ridden alone she might have kept up with us," said Flett.

Hudon turned on him scornfully.

"Don't you talk, boy. You say you love my poor sister. I thought you did. *Mais!* you ride away and never think of her. You do not turn back, and you come here first."

"You didn't want to go back?" retorted the student.

"Bah! The vagabond—he is worth a hundred of you."

"Don't be hard on the boy, Louis," the leader interposed.
"When a man gets the fright upon him, he can't think of anything but himself. What was the good of turning back anyhow?"

"No good, of course," said High Bluff. "Only it's a pity that a first-class man and a pretty girl should be mopped up by a bit of wind. There's that bag of gold, too. Bet you the cyclone's about carried it back to where it came from."

"What do we do then?" said Hudon.

Talbot gazed round upon the devastated land.

"We'll walk along for a bit, and see if we can find any trace. They might have struck a sort of hole somewhere."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed High Bluff. "They were away out on the open prairie. It struck them out there full. They couldn't have begun to come up near the hill."

"We'll walk round once anyhow."

"A mighty lot of good. Might just as well look around for the horses, or the vultures."

"What we do after that?" asked Hudon.

"Make tracks for the Fort as quick as we can. We must strike the trail from Touchwood, and chance meeting someone. We can't fool around here and starve."

They started, but it was like travelling through a strange land. The hill forked, and they took the wrong direction, little thinking that on the opposite side of the hill were the two whom they were seeking. When they came round the spur, each agreed that further search was useless, so they set off, striking a bee-line across the wilderness towards the Touchwood trail. The entire hill was now between them and the objects of their search.

But, for all that, they were sighted. A solitary figure came up the incline, and stood upon the summit, shading his eyes from the sun, which was now shining again brightly. Presently he distinguished the four distant forms moving over the trackless plain. Apparently his first impulse was to signal them, for he drew his revolver—and then hesitated. A weary smile came over his face, and he shook

his head. His eyes lighted up quickly, the weapon went back to his pocket, and he returned to his companion.

"They are quite safe," he said, as he came up to her. "I could just make them out. But they were too far off for signalling."

Rosalie's face lit up into a smile.

"I'm glad we've all come off so well, thanks to you. But they will think that we are killed."

"You," he corrected; "they'll scarcely trouble about me."

"Of course they will. Didn't you warn them? Didn't you tell them of a place where they would be safe? They ought to think about you a good deal more than me."

"Where are the vultures?" he remarked.

She looked up.

"They were disappointed, after all."

"That is where the tree stood, on which they spent their last moments."

"The poor horse!" cried Rosalie sorrowfully; "if we could only have saved him!"

"Nothing left as a memento," returned the tramp. "Not even a saddle-strap. The cyclone does its work thoroughly."

She shuddered, when she thought of that awful moment of its passing.

"I hope you are not tired," said the tramp. "We must start at once, and cover as much ground as we can before dark."

"Oh no," she said lightly. "It has been nothing but riding all my life. It will be something quite new to walk."

"When we get out of the cyclone streak we shall be all right. I can shoot a tree-partridge, if I have luck. Come along."

They started off across the desolated land at a brisk walk.

But she began to limp a little. He noticed it at once, and asked the cause.

"I hurt my foot when I jumped from the horse. You caught me, you know; then I came to the ground, and my ankle scraped upon a stone. It's only a little sore, not a sprain."

"Take my arm," he said. She gave him a quick glance, and obeyed.

"Where have I got to take you to?" he asked, after a long pause, during which each was thinking of the other.

She had forgotten just then that this man was only the tramp, a stranger who had come suddenly into her life, and who would as suddenly leave it again. She began to reflect that she had only known him for an hour or less, that a short time ago, she had despised him as a worthless vagabond. Since then he had saved her life, and she had come to—well, certainly not to dislike him. He had kissed her when the cyclone came upon them. Now he was already talking of leaving her.

"We were going to Fort Qu'Appelle—didn't you know?" Then she took a deep breath. "I was going to be married."

Was it imagination, or did the arm, that was linked in hers, start slightly? He did not look at her, but asked quite easily:

"Who to, if I may ask?"

"George Flett, the young fellow you saw me with." Then she exclaimed suddenly: "But I won't marry him. I don't like him. I hate him. He doesn't care for me a bit, and he is a coward."

"What has he done?" inquired the tramp.

"Look how he rode away from the cyclone. He didn't glance back once. He never thought of me."

"It was a case of *sauve qui peut*. You are French, are you not?"

"Partly. But I've lived always with English-speaking people. My brother Louis hasn't, and that accounts for the difference between us."

"Then you won't marry Flett?"

She looked up. "No! I shall tell him so when we come to the Fort."

"Why not?"

"Because he doesn't love me as he should, and—and because I realise now that I don't love him."

The tramp did not speak. "You have told me nothing about yourself," Rosalie presently observed. "You're not really a—you know what you say you are?"

Then he looked at her, but his eyes were plaintive. "Yes," he said, "I am only a tramp—a curse of the country."

III.

"I DON'T believe you," said Rosalie.

"I am nothing else now," said the tramp.

"But how do you live?"

"Beg and steal," he replied in his caustic manner.

"You steal——" she began.

"If wandering from place to place, without a friend, without a home, working sometimes, and wanting always, loafing about towns, and getting dead-beat passages on trains, isn't tramping, what do you call it?"

"Misfortune."

"You can't altogether call it that. In Winnipeg, I have been offered work—a clerkship in a bank, an assistant in a store. I was reduced to starvation—still I refused."

"Why did you?"

"Perhaps it was pride. It might have been hatred for my fellow-creatures. I thought it was a desire for solitude. I love the prairie, and the wild land of the north," the tramp continued, gazing round on the cyclone-swept plain. "I like to study the

passions of nature, and learn her strange ways. The knowledge I have acquired has been of some use to-day."

"But now you have money. You know where to find more," said Rosalie.

The tramp smiled. "Can it give me back what I have lost?" "What is that?"

"Confidence in woman."

He looked straight ahead where already a line of trees showed along the horizon, and walked more quickly as if forgetful of her lame foot. She had not misjudged those lines of trouble that were stamped upon his face. This man was a tramp perhaps, not from necessity—though he might have called it so—but by choice. For all that, what a thorough man he was. A diamond of the first water, which had yet been spoilt in the cutting. What a true-hearted friend he had already proved himself. What a loyal husband he would have made.

"You are sorry for me," he said suddenly, almost sharply.

"Yes—very," she replied.

"Don't! I'm not worth it. Fools aren't deserving of pity."

"You're not a fool, whatever else you may call yourself," said Rosalie boldly.

"Not a fool to allow my life and my happiness to be wrecked? What do you call me?"

She flushed. "I think you are kind and good."

His arm tightened upon hers again. "I have not spoken with a lady, under any sense of equality, for years. You think me rough and unmannerly. I am. It is a natural consequence of solitude."

"Why don't you begin over again? You're young," said the girl, herself at the starting-point of life, and therefore unable to understand how difficult a thing it is to retrace the footsteps that have been misplaced. "If you could find someone who liked you, someone with whom you felt you might be perfectly happy, don't you think——"

"It is impossible," he interrupted sharply, but the next instant sighed and looked at her.

She flushed again as she felt his glance. "At least," she said hurriedly, "you might tell me your name."

"What good would that be to you? I have none—now. I came to you as a tramp; I shall leave you as a tramp. If you ever think of me, it will be as a tramp."

"The tramp," she corrected, in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper. "No I shan't," she said. "I shall think of you—if we don't meet again—as the gentleman who saved my life."

"Once upon a time," he said slowly, as though he were starting a fairy tale, "I was known as an English gentleman. My name lies buried within the grave of my past life."

"Won't you tell me something about it?" Rosalie pleaded.

"What is the use of repeating a very old tale? The story of

misplaced love, and of failure? I need scarcely remind you of the power you women have over us. Some you make, and some you mar—some you mar," he repeated, and clenched his hands together tightly.

"That is supposed to be an old tale too, isn't it?" she said pityingly.

"Yes, it is the song that the sirens sang," he replied.

Rosalie knew nothing of the classics, so the meaning in this was beyond her. But she noticed that her companion's footsteps were becoming erratic, that he walked unsteadily from side to side. His face was white and drawn.

"Is—there anything the matter with you?" she asked timidly.

He pulled himself together. "You're getting tired, I know. You are limping more."

"Am I?" She pursued her subject. "But you don't look well."

"Work and excitement, without food, often tells on the body," he said. "These things come on suddenly. You're strong one minute, weak and sick the next. My eyes are none too strong. How far off are the trees?"

She had been trained to measure distances by a glance. "Quite three miles. Can you do it?"

The tramp staggered. "Of course I can," he said thickly, and then: "Can you hear any sound? I caught it just now, but it's gone again."

She listened, and presently detected a faint sound of melody, that rose and fell like distant swell on a shingle beach. The tramp heard it too. "It is just outside the cyclone streak," he muttered. "The wind's blowing against it."

"Who would it be?" she asked.

"Sioux. They're celebrating their deliverance. I know the bands around here, so we'll be safe if we can cover the distance. It's getting dark, isn't it?"

The shadows were lengthening a little, but it was still perfectly light. "Oh, you must be very ill!" Rosalie exclaimed.

His face was ghastly, he began to sway to and fro. Then he sank down on the side of a grass hillock with a deep groan. He tried to speak, but the words would not come; he raised his hand, but it fell again. Then his head dropped, and the limbs settled. He had fainted.

Rosalie was a girl of the prairie, therefore accustomed to act on emergency. She did not waste any time in useless lamentations, or in vain efforts to revive him. She looked round quickly, and noted that the hillock on which he lay was the highest point on that part of the plain. Then she tucked her skirt over her arm, and set off, half running, half walking, in the direction of the Indian encampment.

The heat combined with the exertion to inflame the slight sore upon her foot. Every moment it grew more painful, but she pressed on, knowing well that if she stopped, even for a few moments, the limb would stiffen, and walking would become an impossibility. It was fortunate that all the loose needle-grass had been swept away by the cyclone, for otherwise the journey would have been out of the question. Sometimes she ran, then walked on panting, with flushed cheeks and hair tumbling over her shoulders in true native fashion, with bitter sobs of pain, and hot gaspings for breath.

The bluffs ahead came out sharply. In spite of her difficulties she was getting over the ground at a good speed. The uncouth strains swelled out louder, and she steered in the direction of these sounds, half wondering what her reception would be. For a moment she hesitated, then thought again on the silent figure lying far behind, and pressed on. He had saved her, and suffered for her; she could at least do a little for him. He cared for nobody, and had nobody to care for him. Yes he had; she cared for him, or she would not have been doing this. She wondered—and not for the first time—what he thought of her.

Her head was swimming, while her foot seemed to burn as though in a fire. But she could now see the small saskatoon bushes, and the scrub behind, springing up on the very limit of the barren belt. She could define the sounds ahead. There was a sharp metallic beating; a faint cry uprose, which grew deeper when the braves joined in, shriller as the wives took up the fantastic strain, and furious when the entire assembly caught the highest note and hung to it with the full force of their lungs. Then it died away in a series of long-drawn-out echoes. Presently the faint trembling cry began again to ascend, whilst the drums were tapped softly, and the young men came forward, painted for the dance.

There was a guttural exclamation of fear, the chorus ceased suddenly when Rosalie came up, her hair flying, the heat streaming from her face. The medicine-men shouted out, and waved their relics wildly, while the braves squatted in a superstitious terror. Doubtless they thought that this girl, in her dark and picturesque beauty, was the maid Wasayap, or some other reproving spirit of their mythology.

She cried out and dispelled their fear in a strange mixture of French and Sioux, which some of them understood. She told her story, and explained where the sufferer could be found, and how he had succumbed from hunger and exhaustion. "We know him," said an old man, attired in a parti-coloured blanket, with grey lines of hair falling along each side of a deeply wrinkled countenance. "He is a good white man."

Weary, and full of pain as she was, her heart throbbed quicker at this. Even these natives, who hated the white invader, praised the tramp.

The young men brought up their ponies. An old wife wrapped a large bannock inside a grimy piece of buckskin, together with a goodly portion of prairie chicken; a bottle which had once held spirit was filled with water; the party prepared to start.

But now that the journey was over, Rosalie found herself helpless. She had gone through a good deal that day, even for a girl of the plains, and when the time came for her to mount the *shaganappi* pony and ride again, nature rebelled against the additional strain. "I can't," she said holding to the pony's mane, and scarcely daring to rest her quivering foot upon the ground. "I can't ride any more, I'm so tired."

The others hesitated. "Go on," she cried at them. "He may be dying out there by himself."

A couple of men placed themselves one on each side of her, and led her to the open. Darkness was falling rapidly over the tract that the cyclone had devastated. One of her guides pointed beyond, with the quick question: "Where?"

"On the highest point," said Rosalie.

"See," said one of the natives. "She come along here."

This was enough for them. They sprang forward at once along the trail that an untrained eye would not have noticed, the trail that Rosalie's small hurrying feet had made. The girl was led back to the encampment, where the mysterious ceremonies continued.

She reclined upon a cowhide near the entrance to one of the tents, which was protected against mosquitoes by a slow smoke fire. The scene grew darker and more mysterious. A half circle of old wives squatted solemnly, and beat out the refrain on their drums. Shadows, sometimes whispering, sometimes shrieking aloud as though in pain, crossed and recrossed, with arms stretched tightly at their sides. A thin line of brightly coloured papooses wound here and there snake-like, singing the old song that had been handed down from generation to generation for many hundreds of years. The fires twinkled in all directions, like inquisitive red eyes, while the smoke collected in a dim cloud overhead and blotted out the stars. Faint yellow gleams of light weirdly illumined the slender poplar columns, as the evening lightning began to play softly across the sky behind.

The moving figures grew more fantastic and unreal. An old wife leant over, and tended to her injured foot. The cool herb ointment was delicious when it came in contact with the hot inflamed flesh. The old woman's deft tending fingers soothed her; her dusky face seemed to grow more fixed and mask-like. Then it disappeared altogether, and she fell asleep.

It was after midnight when she awoke. The dancers had gone, the fires had burnt down, coolness had taken the place of heat. Lightning still flickered constantly across the sky. Rosalie raised herself, more than half expecting to find her brother, or the stalwart figure of High Bluff stretched near the edge of the willow scrub; but

all she saw was the dim outline of many forms lying about like wadded bundles, with heads half wrapped up in blankets. Then she remembered previous events. A wife came along and walked to one of the poplars, where a suspended baby was disturbing the quietness of the night. Rosalie called to her. She nodded, and soon came up with the complaining child in her arms.

"Where is the white man?" asked Rosalie eagerly.

"The boy?" said the young wife, smiling. "He—over there." She put out her hands in imitation of a recumbent figure. "Asleep."

"He is well? You are sure of it?"

The other nodded. "Ho, squaw!" she cried with growing interest, mindful of her own late purchase. "He just bought you? How much he give for you?"

"Never mind," said the girl. "That's all I wanted to know."

But the other was more inquisitive.

"Why he send to the place of the Calling Spirit.* Why he send *nitchi* boy there?"

"When? What do you mean?" said Rosalie.

The wife pointed in the direction of distant Fort Qu'Appelle. "He tell boy to go an' tell them you alive, the great wind did not kill you. Why he do that?"

Rosalie gave a little cry.

"When did he go?"

"He not gone yet; he wait till it is light. Then he go."

This should have been good news for her. By the time of evening young Flett and her brother could reach the native encampment by hard riding. Then she would be expected to say farewell to the tramp, and return with them. At the present time they thought her dead. There was surely no reason why they should not be allowed to think so a little longer. She confessed to herself that she was becoming interested in the tramp. He seemed to be an original character, and such are not to be picked up every day, not even on the prairie. Her conclusion was that her friends at Fort Qu'Appelle could very well be left in ignorance—for another day anyhow.

"I am going to see the *nitchi* boy," said Rosalie determinedly.

The young wife nodded. "I send him to you."

She went off through the starlight with the child, and presently returned in the company of a young heavy-featured man, who bore all the appearances of having been suddenly aroused from slumber.

"You are going to the Fort?" asked Rosalie at once.

The man assented mutely.

"When do you start?" she pursued.

He turned towards the east, and held out his hand.

"When it is light? Well, I do not want you to go," she said boldly.

* Qu'Appelle (Who calls?)

The Indian was not in the least surprised. He merely nodded again.

"You are not to see the white boy, but you must leave at dawn. You will go hunting instead," commanded Rosalie. She felt for her purse, and pulled forth corruption and bribery in the shape of a two-dollar note. This she gave him. "See, you are to go and hunt. The white boy won't know whether you've gone to the Fort or not. You understand?"

The man nodded again and went off, while Rosalie lay down with an idea of returning to the land of slumber.

But her brain, after the first piece of deliberate plotting she had ever been guilty of, was active and restless. She watched the dark shadows of the *tepees*, with the sleeping forms scattered about, and began to wonder which of those silent bodies was his. She pictured him as he would look with the brown beard removed, his hair trimmed, and a decent cut of clothes to his back. Then she compared him mentally, and half unconsciously, to her *fiancé*. Somehow, all she could see was a young man, riding recklessly in terror of his life away from her, and quite regardless of her safety; while there was another on the same horse as herself, protecting and guiding her to a place of safety. This latter was unfortunately only a tramp, and these gentlemen were universally regarded as the curse of the country. The former was well connected in Winnipeg, and would graduate the following year at the newly-founded University of Manitoba. The comparison was after all ridiculous. What would her western friends think, if it were known that she had seriously formed an attachment to a tramp? For all that, he was one of the nicest men and one of the truest gentlemen she had ever met. And it was with this thought that she fell asleep for the second time.

Refreshed and strong again, the tramp was astir at an early hour. He gave his native friends a hearty salutation, noticed that the young brave, whom he had entrusted with a message to the Fort, had left the encampment, and then inquired after Rosalie. She was very well, said the young wife who had spoken to her during the night. How many ponies had the white boy given for her? But the white boy only laughed, and jested with the dark-faced young squaw in her own tongue. Then he went down to a bluff of white poplar, in the centre of which spread a small circular sleugh of amber-coloured water.

"Good-morning, Miss Rosalie," said a pleasant voice.

The girl glanced round with a start and a deep blush. She was standing at the entrance of a tent, twisting up her heavy coils of dark hair as best she could without looking-glass or assistance.

"Oh, is it you? And—and how are you?"

"I'm all right again," said the tramp heartily. "And how's the foot?"

"Ever so much better. But you shouldn't have come upon me like this."

He laughed. "Why not? I suppose I can't be of any use?"

"No," she said. "Of course you can't."

"Not in that way. But I can get you something for breakfast," he said, and left her to finish coiling her hair. He looked a different man, in spite of the ragged clothes and the old felt hat. The rest, and the fresh water of the sleugh had done much for his appearance. Added to that, there remained the fact, that the gentleman always looks the gentleman, however he is dressed.

It was Rosalie who managed to give a serious turn to the conversation some half an hour latter. They had strolled together to the outskirts of the encampment, and stood looking over the barren land. There was nobody near.

"When are we going to start?" she asked innocently.

"We are staying here to-day, if you don't mind," he said, gazing at her half wistfully. "I should have told you before. I have sent a messenger to the Fort."

Rosalie half turned.

"Have you?" she said faintly. "What for?"

"To tell them that you are safe, and to let them know where you are."

"Then," she said, "they will be here by evening."

"Yes, to take you away." There was a change in his voice.

"Oh," she said with a little sigh, and then there was silence which he broke in an awkward fashion:

"You are a very plucky girl. You saved me yesterday, and——"

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't talk of saving! What have you done for me?"

"I didn't run two or three miles, tired, and with a sore foot."

"Don't talk of it please." Then, suddenly: "What are you going to do?"

"When?"

"This evening. When they come for me."

"Follow my profession, of course. I shall keep on in the old way—tramping. We shan't meet after to-day. Why—what's the matter?" he exclaimed, in a manner very different from the cynical mood he had adopted.

Rosalie was crying.

IV.

THE soft golden light of evening fell in a warm mantle over the flowery vale of Qu'Appelle, and shimmered upon the smiling waters of the numerous lakes, where brooded the mysterious echo that had given the place its name. Upon a narrow neck of land, which divided

two of these small bodies of water, were clustered the few huts and buildings that comprised the little village. Only a stone's throw from the shore, surrounded by many picturesque log-cabins of the half-breed, and webs of fishing-nets which everywhere were hung up to dry, appeared the Fort itself. Within, among others, were the four men who had lately escaped from the cyclone.

"That's how it was, Pete. That's how we worked the racket," said High Bluff.

"You did well, boys," said the factor, who had just listened to all details of their experience.

"None so bad, considering. But, mind you, Pete, two of us were mopped up, and I'm not sayin' it was the worst two. It was a terrible thing about poor Miss Rosalie, but what could we do?"

"You're right. It's hard to lose Miss Rosalie that way. Ay, wonderful fine and handsome she was. It's too bad, boys. Now we could have spared the tramp——"

"Hold on there, Pete. That fellow's a countryman of mine," interrupted Talbot.

"And if it hadn't been for him, the whole crowd of us would have been clean wiped out, as we camped on the edge of that bluff," said High Bluff. Then he added: "Wish I could have won that bag of gold off him. 'Twas only wasted anyhow."

"I'm not for running any man down, least of all dead 'uns," said the factor. "I allow I'm sort of set against tramps though. A couple of 'em got into the store last month, and helped themselves at the Company's expense."

"Well, they're only following their profession, if you come to look at it," said Talbot; and a dreary laugh went round.

"It's grand to be here, after that everlasting tramping," said the gambler, filling his pipe. "Tell you, Pete, for fellows that ain't used to walking, it came pretty hard on the feet to pull our old carcasses along that Touchwood trail."

"With empty stomachs," added Talbot.

"And a bush fire coming along behind quick as snakes."

"'Twas a bad fire, too," said the factor. "Lucky we had that rain last night. The *nitchies* say it's right out now."

Young Flett roused himself, and walked across to the door. "Going out, Alf?" inquired High Bluff.

The young man looked back. "Don't know. Seems to me I might as well drive into Troy to-night, and catch the express east."

"Cheer up, lad. You've been hard hit, there's no denying. There's lots of other girls, you mind."

"Yes—others," said Hudon moodily. "They are good for him. But, they are not sisters of mine."

"That's so, Louis," said the gambler. "You're the one that's lost on this journey, right enough."

"I go out," said the French-Canadian. "I will walk by the lake, and then go to vespers. I pray for the soul of my poor sister."

The leader joined him. "I'll walk round with you, Louis. I'd forgotten that it was Sunday."

"Come, my friend," said the other simply, and they went out together.

High Bluff pulled out his cards, and drew in to the table for a game with the factor and his German assistant. Young Flett walked out by himself, and borrowed a half-breed's boat for a row on the lake. The valley became animated with moving figures.

Two travellers, a man and a young woman, came across prairie, mounted on Indian ponies. They were riding slowly, and an observant eye might have noticed that neither seemed in a hurry to proceed. The girl, indeed, was holding back her not unwilling pony, as though she were desirous of lengthening out the journey indefinitely. Suddenly she pulled up altogether. Her companion did the same, and turned to her with the question: "Tired?"

"A little."

"Well, we haven't far to go," he said reassuringly.

"I know that. We go up this incline, down again, through the bluff, then up the hill. We shall be looking down on the village, and—and anyone can see us."

"Why shouldn't they? They ought to be glad to see you again."

"Yes," said Rosalie, with a catch in her voice. "I suppose they will be."

"Are you ready to move?"

"There is the trail over there—isn't it?" she asked irrelevantly, pointing.

"Yes; the trail to Troy. The one I shall take, when I have left you. The Indian meets me at the *dépôt* for the ponies."

"What shall you do then?"

"I haven't made up my mind. Perhaps try to get a passage on the Pacific express, and go back to the mountains."

"And forget about—the cyclone?"

The ponies began to pull at the long grass.

"No; not altogether."

"You will. Now you want to hurry on, get rid of me, and go away."

"I do," he said; "and I don't."

"Why don't you?" she asked.

But he did not look at her. "I think we'd better move on."

"I'm tired of riding," said Rosalie petulantly.

"Shall we walk then? It isn't far."

"Yes," she said, and he jumped from his pony.

"Aren't you going to help me down?"

He bit his lip. Then he came up, and she held out her hands. Their fingers met and closed tightly. At the same moment the pony

started aside, she lost her balance and fell forward, but he caught her. For an instant his arms were folded round her. He set her safely on the grass, and drew back a little. She blushed, and averted her head. There was an awkward pause, until he went after the pony which had strayed away.

"I hope you haven't hurt your foot again?" he said quietly, when he came back.

"No," she replied.

They walked on side by side, leading their ponies, but without speaking for some time. She felt unhappy and rebellious, because she thought that this was to be her last hour in the tramp's society. They were approaching the Fort; she would soon be restored to her friends, who would welcome her as one brought back from the dead. She knew that the high-minded man, who had protected her all along, felt it his duty to hand her over to young Flett, her *fiancé*, who would claim her immediately. The wedding was to take place in the following week.

And the feelings of the tramp, beneath his cloak of cynicism? After these years of lonely wandering he had again been brought in contact with a woman, and he had been drawn to her by an irresistible force of inclination. He had made himself a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, on account of the treachery and faithlessness of one. Force of circumstances had compelled him to take care of this healthy, pure-minded girl—a pleasant, if painful, duty. Was she like that other? He told himself, no. Yet she was not his; he had no right to her; she belonged to another. He must give her over, say "Good-bye," and come away. Back again to the roving life, with the loneliness intensified.

"The needle-grass is pricking my feet dreadfully," Rosalie said at length, looking up plaintively.

"Won't you ride again?" he suggested.

"No," she replied, walking on obstinately. "I'm tired of riding."

They reached the bluff, where it was cool and shady, and entered it. A couple of purple butterflies rose from a brier-thicket, and played along the trail in a ray of sunlight. Rosalie followed the course of these bright insects, and gave a little sigh when they disappeared.

The tramp heard it, and attempted to divert her thoughts.

"Do you think your friends will be at the Fort?"

"I suppose so," she said wearily. "Why shouldn't they be? You know that they escaped the cyclone."

"It's strange that there was no reply to my message. You didn't seem very surprised when nobody came for you."

For a moment she had forgotten her little treacherous effort.

"Oh!" she remarked carelessly. "Perhaps they don't want to see me again."

The tramp's attempt at a laugh was not successful.

"You know that is ridiculous." He could not see that her eyes were filled with tears, because she held her head down. "There is your brother," he reminded her.

"Yes I want to see him," she said as they came out of the bluff. "Will you do something for me?" she went on quickly.

"Anything I can—you know that."

"Leave me here. Go and tell Louis where I am. Don't tell the others—and bring him here."

"What's your reason?"

She began to tremble. "Because I—I want to tell him that I won't marry Alfred. I will never marry him. I never want to see him again. He doesn't love me, and he has treated me shamefully."

The tramp's voice was scarcely audible.

"When we get to the top of this hill we shall look down on the village."

An exclamation of astonishment escaped him. For she burst into tears.

"Am I to leave you when we reach the top? You can walk down to the Fort."

"No," she sobbed. "Don't leave me there."

"Then I'll see you on to the door."

"It was all my doing," she confessed brokenly. "I told the Indian not to take your message. That's why they didn't come for me. They think I am dead."

They came to the top of the hill. He stopped and looked at her.

"Why did you do that—Rosalie?" But she did not reply. "You say that you will not marry young Flett. Do you mean it?"

He bent down to catch her answer. It came in the form of a monosyllable.—"Yes."

"Then—then you are free again?"

Her head went a little lower, but the answer was the same.

He gave a great groan, and turned from her to glance upon the peaceful scene beneath; upon the glittering lake spotted with the white and brown sails of small craft; upon the silver stretch of smooth beach. He saw the groups of children running gleefully here and there, and the gaily-dressed couples promenading at the side of the narrow Qu'Appelle river. A couple of men had left the village, and were advancing in their direction. From the sky-outlined spire of the small Catholic Church a single sweet-toned bell sounded forth the summons to vespers.

The tramp turned his weary eyes, in which the light of hope was dawning slowly, towards the girl at his side.

"May I tell you something of myself?" he said simply.

She raised her eyes and dropped them again quickly.

"I should like to hear it."

He hesitated a moment, and gazed lovingly upon her dark rich coils of hair. Then he commenced:

"I have been a tramp for a little over four years, and during that time I have not spoken to a civilised woman—you are the first I have met since I came out to the prairie with the idea of spending the remainder of my life in solitude."

"What made you?" she said softly.

"It is an old tale—the oldest tale of all. I loved a woman in England, and I was sure that she loved me. I only discovered my mistake a short time before our intended marriage. She was entirely heartless; all she wished for was the position that my money and my name could bring her; she was a skilful actress and had deceived me. Now you know."

Rosalie kept her eyes upon the grass.

"Did you love her so much as that?" she asked.

"I thought I did. Time has healed the wound and shown me my mistake. But I was desperate then; I hated society and resolved to shun it; I hated all women on account of her. I had been badly bitten once; I said that I would not be bitten again."

"So you chose the life of a tramp," she said. "How funny! All tramps say they have been gentlemen once. I can always see through them—as I saw through you."

His eyes lit up.

"You did penetrate my disguise then?"

"Yes," she nodded, and then blushed again.

"I am of a good old English family," he went on quietly, with just the right amount of pride. "I am rich and highly-connected, though I am only a tramp."

She smiled at him.

"You were a tramp," she amended.

"Shall we settle that question now? Whether my tramping days are over depends upon you—Rosalie."

Her head went down; she began to tremble again.

He took her hand and pressed it softly.

"Do you care for me a little, Rosalie?"

Then she looked up, and smiled through her tears. To him it was like the sun shining upon the dew.

"I did despise you when I first saw you because I really thought you were a tramp."

"So I was," he interrupted, but she took no notice.

"Then I saw how clever you were. I found out that you were good, and that you were kind. I couldn't help liking you, though I tried to believe I was in love with Alfred."

"Rosalie," he exclaimed, drawing her towards him. "Have you really fallen in love with a tramp?"

She laughed outright, and then blushed. "I fear I have," she murmured. And then her head went down upon his shoulder.

"I thought I had lived my life," he whispered to her. "But life is before me after all, and with you."

"I am glad," she whispered back. "And—and—I have never been so happy."

The men walking up from the valley were now close to them. "I need not go for your brother," said the tramp. "He is here, and the Indian agent is with him."

She looked up brightly and waved her hand. The two men started in surprise.

"Here is your sister," called the tramp, and they hurried up at once.

"Rosalie! By what miracle are you here?" cried her brother.

"He will tell you," said Rosalie, pointing to the tramp. Then the tramp took the French-Canadian aside and told him the story. When they returned, Hudon was radiant as his sister. He addressed himself to Talbot. "I say it before; that vagabond—he is a true man. I say it again, my friend."

"I'm not going to contradict you," returned Talbot.

"And he is going to marry Rosalie. He is a rich man, and his name is Monsieur——"

"Philip Everard, in England—William Smith out here," said the quondam tramp, with a faint trace of his late cynicism.

There was excitement at the Fort when the party arrived. High Bluff, in the act of discarding, in his amazement threw away a couple of aces. The factor sat upright with frightened face, until reassured that Rosalie was a tangible presence. Young Flett was still out on the lake.

"You will see the young man, little sister?" said Hudon, later on.

Rosalie hesitated. "Yes," she said at length; so her brother went for him. The result of the meeting was that Flett, angry and crest-fallen, left during the night to catch the east-bound express at Troy.

An evening later, Philip Everard, to give him his proper name, came along the edge of the waters after sunset. He was on his way to meet Rosalie; he looked well and happy, and some ten years younger as he passed along with brisk step. That day he had written to his friends and his solicitor in England. There was a heavy bag in his pocket which bumped continually against his side. This was the gold which he had spent his weary leisure in collecting along the shores of Mackenzie's river.

He came before the Indian Industrial school, and there he paused, for there was a dark figure in a cassock promenading to and fro. It was the principal, Father Hugon.

"Good evening, father," said the wayfarer, raising his felt hat slightly.

"Good evening, and God's blessing upon you, my son," said the priest kindly.

The other pushed a heavy bag suddenly into his hands. "A thank-offering," he said shortly. "For the services of the church." Then he passed away with a long swinging step, leaving the father amazed and almost speechless. "Good man! Good man!" he said at length softly.

Everard met Rosalie near the brink of the darkening lake at the outskirts of the little village. They walked along arm-in-arm by the side of those peaceful waters around which the Indian imagination has cast so many a strange tale.

"Mr. Flett has gone back home," she said prettily. "Do you think you can take care of me?"

"I'll try," he replied. "I think I shall be able to, Rosalie."

"Tell me this," she said presently; "why have you been going about in rags when you were rich all the time? Why did you allow yourself to be brought to the point of starvation, when there was no need for it?"

"Because I believe in acting a part thoroughly. I had resolved to seek in absolute poverty for that which I had failed to find in wealth. I have been successful, thank God. Certainly there have been times when I should have been very glad of money. But I have no bank account out here, and I could not have my own in England by the mere wish. As it is I'm going to be a tramp for a month longer."

"No you're not," said Rosalie, with a determined shake of the head.

"I shan't have any means before then," he said laughing.

"What have you done with that bag of gold?"

He laughed again.

"Shall we suppose that I've lost it?"

"I know you very well already. You've given it away. Now, you'll have to borrow from me. How nice."

"I've no security to offer you," he said seriously.

"Never mind. I shall keep you as hostage."

"A month is a very little time after all. Then we'll be married, shall we?"

She blushed a little. "Yes—if you like."

"And then we'll go to England, to the dear old land I never expected to see again. It is you who are taking me back, Rosalie, my darling."

"We shall be so happy together, Philip," she murmured. "I'm so glad we got in the way of that cyclone."

"And that we were saved. I didn't care then, but all is very different now."

They stood together by the lake at the side of a black poplar. His arm was round her, and her luxuriant coils of hair rested against his shoulder. Together they watched the stars lighting one by one.

"Do you know the legend that gave this place its name?" she said softly.

"I've heard it. But I should like to listen to it again, from you."

"It was in the very old time," began Rosalie, in her pretty, fresh voice. "An Indian warrior was just going to be married, and one day he wandered far away from the camp hunting. Suddenly, at evening—it must have been an evening like this—he heard a voice softly calling his name. He knew that it was the voice of his sweetheart, and he was very much afraid as he called out the reply, '*Qu'appelle ?*' The spirit voice called again. With unhappy forebodings he stepped into his canoe, and glided down the stream, and at sunrise he came to the encampment. He learnt then that at the time of sunset on the previous day, his sweetheart had passed away to the spirit land. He said not a word, but went back to his canoe, and glided out again upon the lake. And nobody ever saw him again. The Indians about here still say that he haunts the lake with his sad cry, '*Qu'appelle ?*'"

"Have you ever heard it?" he asked, looking into her face.

"No, never. It is a sad story, isn't it? Not like ours—all happiness."

"We will try the echo," he said. "Let's see what answer it will give us."

They laughed at each other for the very foolishness of the idea, then they called together:

"*Qu'Appelle ?*"

They waited, and soon the sound, clear and soft as an evening bell, came back to them over the waters:

"*Qu'Appelle ?*"

"Rosalie!" cried out the girl.

"The tramp!" cried Everard.

She put a hand over his mouth, and exclaimed, "No, not now; never again."

The answers came back severally from the lonely mysterious stretch of waters, "Rosalie." "The tramp." A pause. "No, not now; never again."

He bent down and kissed her fondly.

"And they are quite right, my dearest."



RIVER DREAMS.

THE golden grain is ripening on the hills ;
The cattle lie around the wide-branched elm ;
The ancient town is far behind me now ;
I see the vane upon the old church-tower
Shimmer amidst the trees—and now a bend
Hides trees and all, and I row on up-stream,
Alone beneath the sunny summer sky,
Alone between the great grain-cover'd hills—
On the far-winding river all alone.

* * * * *

I.

Far-winding river, and hill-side, and meadow,
Sweet summer-tide !
Under the willow-tree's flickering shadow,
The great fish hide.

Oars, dip down silently ; willows, wave lazily ;
Heart, beat not high !
Hills, in the noonday heat fade away hazily ;
Breezes, lie by !

Dragon-fly, slowly sail past on thy gleaming
Paradise wings ;
Birds in the woods know the river is dreaming—
Never one sings !

II.

Sing to me, sing to me, swift-flowing river !
My heart can hear ;
Sing me the songs that thou singest for ever,
When no one is near !

What dost thou say when the pale moonbeams glisten
On lily-flowers ?
What, when the swan hears, and stays him to listen,
In reedy bowers ?

What is it you tell to the slow-swaying rushes,
And willow-tree ?
And what do you whisper when daybreak first flushes ?
Oh, tell it to me !

III.

Tell me, oh river, tell all the old story
Of long, long ago—
Did the world wear this same summer-glory
That we all know ?

Did mortal lips ever confide thee their sorrow
Ere Caesar came ?

Were all days like this day? And will to-morrow
Be still the same?

Did the grey wagtails on rushes sit swinging—
Bees build their comb—
On that far ago day when Launcelot was bringing
Guinevere home?

Hither thro' rye and sweet-scented clover,
And barley-sheaves,
Hand in hand wander'd fair maiden and lover
On summer eves?

Did pale cloister'd nuns, in convent walls, hearing
Thee ripple by,
Wonder to find their heart-strings a-stirring,
And knew not why?

While to the lovers, all down the swift river,
The vesper-bell
Told that to true love for ever and ever
All should be well?

* * * * *

I.

O river, well I know thou nothing carest
For human sorrow!
What pity hast thou had for best or fairest,
Or wilt to-morrow?

And furious foemen lock'd in iron embraces
Death could not sever,
Left but a ripple for their quarrel's traces—
Thou smilest ever!

How should'st thou reck for any pain or passion
Of our brief story?
Thou flowest on, thro' all earth's changing fashion
And passing glory!

II.

Yet, foolish river, why so swiftly goest?—
Far, far away
Lies the sad city whereunto thou flowest—
Linger, if thou may!

Linger here between the happy fallows,
Where, on broad leaves,
The lilies bask in back-waters and shallows;
And sunset weaves

Such glories on thy rippling reaches—gleaming
Rose-red and gold,
Thro' pollard and acacia branches streaming—
As wizard old

Saw, while he lay entranced in magic vision
Of faery-dell,
Where unimagined lights of fields elysian
Unfading fell.

III.

Lo, many a league adown the crowded city
 Doth hem thee in ;
 O river, river, art thou moved to pity
 Its pain and sin ?
 Else why so swiftly dost thou hasten thither ?
 Oh, dost thou know
 When thou shalt come there, all thy flowers must wither
 For thou must flow
 By dingy streets, and alleys foul and noisome,
 And never feel
 Airs fragrant with the breath of clover-blossom
 Above thee steal !

IV.

Yet, hasten, hasten, tho' thy flowers all wither,
 Nor be beguiled,
 The great and famous city calls thee thither—
 Thy foster-child !
 Well mayst thou leave behind the clover-blossom
 And loud mill-wheels,
 To bear between the marshlands on thy bosom
 Ten thousand keels !
 Whether by field or wharf, O fruitful river,
 Thy waters go,
 In all thy course thou servest man for ever,
 For weal or woe.

V.

No, no, thou can'st not linger, mighty river,
 In thy swift flow ;
 Far, far adown the sea calls thee for ever :
 Thou needs must go.
 Must wind between the hills and pleasant meadows,
 Where cattle feed ;
 Must flow by islands the acacia shadows,
 By tufted reed.
 By noisy weir, by bridge, by lock and ferry
 Thou can'st not stay ;
 Past town and hamlet, and loud mill-wheel merry
 That hums all day.
 While many a streamlet tinkles down the valleys
 From far and wide,
 And many a tribute river brings its rallies
 To swell thy tide.

VI.

At dawn and eve, and star-lit midnight eery,
 In noontide's blaze,
 In golden August and December dreary,
 And April days—

As in the thousand years behind thee lying,
Still thou dost hear
The wild sea-voices to the rivers crying,
More and more near.

"Flow down, flow down!" cry all the wild sea-voices
With hollow moan;
And the deep river, as it hears, rejoices,
Hasting adown.

VII.

Flow down, strong river, seawards flow for ever,
By town and lea;
Flow down, deep river, yet thou never, never
Shalt gain the sea!

Nor we, that to a vaster sea are wending,
Can ever come
Quite there, whereunto we for ever tending
Yet have our home.

VIII.

Flow down, glad river, seawards flow for ever!
To-morrow lies
Before thee, with soft winds that blow for ever,
'Neath summer skies.

Flow down, sad river, seawards flow for ever!
Thou can'st not stay;
To-morrow comes—but left behind for ever
Is yesterday.

Flow down, great river, seawards flow for ever!
In years to be
Thou wilt tell others this same tale for ever
Thou tell'st to me.

* * * * *

I.

Thou in the unfill'd sea thy waters pourest
By night and day;
Clouds bring them all again from marsh and forest
A world away!

The little ripples playing on thy reaches,
Once, it may be,
Lapp'd round the rocks and sands of ocean-beaches,
By southern sea.

Or 'neath the bows of ships at anchor riding
Beyond the west—
O river, tell me where the sea is hiding
The islands blest.

II.

Oh, let me hear thy secrets, whispering river!
Hush, dripping oars!

I, listening, hear the story that the river
Tells to the shores !

I hear at last the story that the river
Whispers low—
What need to speak so softly, whispering river?
Dost thou not know

That they who hear the tale thou tell'st for ever
To hill and plain,
Altho' they know the meaning, yet can never
Tell it again ?

* * * * *

The day is done and I awake from dreams.
One streak of dusky flame floats in the west
Above the purpling outline of the hills ;
The trees seem listening to me in the dark ;
But these are not the trees I knew by day—
Strange shapes they take by night. I see them point—
They whisper to each other as I pass.
O river, dost thou know the words they speak ?

Hark ! far away I hear a village clock,
That strikes the hour ; tinkle distinct and small
On the still night. Above me, one by one,
The solemn flowers unclothe which God hath strewn
Through pathless fields of space—the flowers which He
At the last day shall gather in His hand ;
Our little darkling world along with them.

No wind stirs in the poplars ; fast asleep
The lilies lie, with soft white eyelids furled
On golden eyes. The heavy-headed reeds
Nod in their sleep, and only I awake.

And now beyond the wood the ferry gleams
Kindly upon the night. How lone and cold
Seems all behind me, now that I draw near
The haunts of men, and see the friendly dance
Of lanterns on the little landing-stage,
And hear the well-known voices welcome home !

MARY A. M. MARKS.

CLARE WESTWOOD'S BROTHER.

BY C. N. CARVALHO.

CLARE WESTWOOD was sitting alone in her little drawing-room waiting for her brother to come in to afternoon tea. Five o'clock seldom found him absent, but to-day the spirit-lamp under the kettle burnt itself out twice, and still there was no sign of him. After a while the girl grew impatient, then uncomfortable, and at last a little anxious. At a quarter to six she rose, crossed the corridor, and knocked at the door of his study. Unless for important business, she never interrupted him at his work, but now his unusual unpunctuality seemed to give her an excuse for so doing.

Her first knock was unheeded, and, half believing him to have left the house, Clare opened the door and peeped in.

Rupert Westwood was seated at his writing-table with both elbows resting on it, and his head bent over a newspaper that lay between them. His sister saw at a glance he was not reading, and his white drawn face and tightly-compressed lips increased her alarm.

She laid her hand on his shoulder without speaking. Her light touch roused him.

"Yes," he said hurriedly, throwing back his head to see who the intruder was. "Is it you, Clare? What do you want with me?"

"Won't you come into tea?" she rejoined, striving not to betray her anxiety. "It is six o'clock, Rupert—or very nearly. I was half afraid you were ill."

"I beg your pardon!" he said apologetically as he rose and began to put his papers together. "I had forgotten the time. Yes, I shall be glad of a cup of tea. Come along, little woman; you should not have waited for me. Nay, leave that paper where it is; I have not done with it yet."

They went across to the drawing-room, and Clare made some fresh tea, for the first supply had long since grown cold. Rupert drank it eagerly and asked for more. Then, stretching himself at full length on the couch, he proceeded to question his sister as to how she had been employing her day.

But Clare was not to be put off in that fashion. She left the table when tea was over, seated herself on a low chair close to the couch, and begged him to tell her what it was that had disturbed him.

"Oh, nothing!" he replied a little wearily. "I am a fool—that is all. And I would rather not talk about my folly; so don't urge me, there's a dear!"

Clare said no more, but her eyes looked troubled. Rupert saw it, and, man-like, gave in.

"Ah, well," he said with a grim smile, as he bent forward to caress her, "you will be fancying something worse than the truth, perhaps, so I had better tell you all. It is only that I came across an adverse review of my book in the very paper where I had hoped to find a favourable one and—and—it upset me for the moment. I shall get used to the sort of thing in time."

"I don't believe you will," rejoined Clare, her blue eyes swimming in tears, "and I am almost inclined to say I hope not! You could not write as you do if you did not put your heart in your work. But I am so sorry! It was in the *Burlington*, then? That was the paper you had on your table, was it not? May I read the critique?"

"You had much better not, dear girl! Well, if nothing else will satisfy you, then, I will run over and fetch it, and we will look over it together. Your woman's wit may find something to soften the sting."

"It is shameful, Rupert!" Clare said indignantly when she came to the end of the article. "I am a partial critic, I own—I love every line you write and always shall. But surely such bitter satire as this is quite uncalled for! Who can have written it?"

"It were hard to say. I can find out if I make it my business to do so, I daresay, though the *Burlington* keeps the names of its contributors very close. But this is more than satire, Clare; it is wanton abuse, nothing less, and will ruin my career altogether."

"Oh, Rupert!"

"It will. The paper is one of standing and influence, and its verdict can kill a book or save it—it does every day. So you will not wonder I was unmindful of your teacups, Clare. But why the *Burlington* should trouble itself to heave a stone at me, I am at a loss to understand. I did not think I was of so much importance."

"Oh, yes, you do!" cried Clare, smiling through her tears. "Your first book made a hit, and you expected more of this one because it appealed to a larger class of readers—you have said so more than once. Oh, I know how it is! Reviewers think it a smart thing to 'slate' (is not that the jargon?) a young author. New writers are to be repressed—the market is over-stocked—How I wish that——"

"Gently, dear, gently. You forget I review books sometimes."

"Ah, but you criticise a book on its merits! If your worst enemy wrote a good book you would praise it. But this man—— Oh, how could the editor insert such a thing?"

"The tone is very unlike that of the *Burlington*, I grant. Perhaps the paper may have changed hands—who knows? All the worse for me! Come out for a walk now; there will just be time before dinner, and I can't settle to work again to-day."

* * * * *

That walk was not a very lively one. The brother and sister said but little, for they both shrank from referring to the notice in the *Burlington*, and yet could think of nothing else.

After dinner Rupert lay back in his chair and dozed, or rather pretended to do so; and Clare, instead of seating herself at the piano as was her custom, took out her work-basket and busied herself over it.

The two lived in a tiny flat in Hampstead, but a certain portion of the year Clare generally spent at Kensington with her aunt, Mrs. Reeve. The time for her departure was drawing near, and she was making preparations for leaving home. Her visit was to be a longer one than usual this year, as she had agreed, when the London gaieties were over, to accompany the old lady to the seaside.

Clare was not wholly dependent on Rupert, but the modest income of a hundred a year, left to her by her father, was totally inadequate to supply her with the countless trifles she required when at her aunt's house; and, in spite of Mrs. Reeve's frequent presents, Rupert found these visits a serious addition to his expenses.

He was thinking over this as he watched his sister through his half-closed eyelids, and wondering sorrowfully if it were right to allow her to lay out so much money on useless finery now that 'Portia,' the book from which he had hoped so much, had failed. The girl looked very pretty as she sat at work with a heap of dainty lace and ribbon in her lap; her fingers deftly bringing them into shape while the colour deepened on her cheek and a tender smile played about her lips.

"What could make Clare smile so brightly?" Rupert asked himself wonderingly. "To-night, too, of all nights in the year when she had just experienced so severe a disappointment." It was no want of feeling, of that he was convinced, for no one could be more sympathetic, more deeply interested in his literary career than was Clare, his only sister. But, novelist as he was, and—presumably—skilled in depicting the workings of the human heart, Mr. Westwood, as a fact, was no quicker than other men to see what was going on around him, or he would soon have found an answer to that question. He would have remembered how, at Mrs. Reeve's house the previous summer, Clare had seen a good deal of a certain Ralph Conway, and that nothing was more likely than that the acquaintance should have ripened into friendship, or even into a warmer feeling. Clare's letters at one time were full of this young barrister, but later his name had dropped out of them, and, as she did not mention him on her return home, Rupert had forgotten his existence.

But, for all that, it was of this very Mr. Conway that Clare was now thinking. From her frills and fichus, her thoughts wandered naturally to the place where they were to be worn and the people she might see there. That Ralph Conway would be among those was a foregone conclusion, for, like others of his profession, he had a good deal of spare time on his hands which it was easy to devote to morning calls. The close friendship that existed between his mother and Clare's aunt, had given him an excuse for running in

and out at all hours, and he had taken advantage of it to pay Miss Westwood a great deal of attention. It was strange that so worldly a woman as was Mrs. Reeve had not seen this and put a stop to it; but, looking upon him as she did as entirely *hors concours*, she may have thought Clare took the same view, and was only amusing herself.

Clare went off to her aunt's a few days later, and Rupert was left to work the season through in solitude. Had 'Portia' been a success, he had intended to show himself a little in society this year, and break the strict incognito under which he lived; but, as it was, he kept aloof more carefully than before. Having taken to a literary life in direct opposition to his father's wish, he had wanted to make a success before disclosing his real name, and even to his publisher was only known by the pseudonym of Walter Tressingham. But his father had been dead three years, and success was still far off—farther off than ever since that cruel review in the *Burlington*, which, as the young author predicted, had fatally influenced the trade.

It was difficult without revealing his identity to make any direct inquiry about the writer of that article. Rupert did what he could, but after all it was from no literary source that he obtained the desired information. One day he came across his old college friend, Charles Graham, the son of an eminent solicitor. The young man had just returned from Egypt, where by the doctor's orders he had been spending the winter, and the two had not met for a very long time. After listening to a detailed account of Graham's adventures, Rupert went on to speak of his own affairs.

"Well, yes, oddly enough, I think I can tell you who reviews for the *Burlington*," Graham said in answer to an (apparently) careless remark of his companion's. "The man was pointed out to me the other night at my club; a lot of literary people go there, as you know. I heard his name too, but I have forgotten it. I am a wretched hand at remembering names, though I never forget a face. No, he is not a member. He was dining with a man called Edwards; they seemed very thick. What do you want to know for?"

Westwood parried the question, but he eagerly accepted an invitation he had intended to decline, to dine with Graham at his club that evening. When they were seated at table an hour or two later, he carefully scanned the faces of his neighbours in the hope that the man he so much desired to see might be among them, but refrained from mentioning him again lest he should excite Graham's curiosity. (His friend knew that he wrote for sundry newspapers and monthly magazines, but nothing more.) The dinner was good and the wine something quite out of the common, but its delicacy of flavour was entirely lost on the young author, and his preoccupation puzzled his host not a little.

Later two men turned into the smoking room where Graham chatted with those he knew, and Westwood enjoyed his cigar in silence. Presently Graham came up behind him.

"You are in luck," he said in a whisper, "there's your man, do you see—the fellow near the door. The one with the thick, brown hair—wonder why he wears it such a length. Shall I get his name from Edwards? I can easily."

"Do, there's a good fellow," Westwood replied, looking in the direction indicated. "The man lighting his cigar you mean, do you not?"

Graham nodded and turned away. Westwood remained seated; his eyes fixed on his unconscious enemy. So absorbed was he that when, a little later, someone addressed him, he hardly for a moment knew who it was.

"We have seen nothing of you lately, Mr. Tressingham," the old man said in a genial tone. Rupert opened his eyes at these words, for the newcomer was Mr. Blank, his publisher, and their connection had been of no advantage to the firm. "Tell me what you are engaged on now. Another novel?"

"Not likely, Mr. Blank," Rupert said ruefully. "You would not advise it, would you? But I am grateful for the kind interest you take in my affairs. It is more than I deserve."

"Nay, you must not be discouraged," returned the other kindly. "These things are greatly matter of chance, Mr. Tressingham. Your book did not hit the ruling taste of the hour, that was all. I believed the work to be a good one, and I do still in spite of the critics. We must hope for better luck next time. By the way——" Then checking himself, he looked across the room. "Well, better not perhaps," he muttered low, and with a shrug of his shoulders began on a fresh subject.

This encounter made Westwood a little more cheerful. It was the first word of encouragement he had received. Possibly the praise Mr. Blank bestowed on 'Portia' was prompted solely by kindness of heart, but that did not occur to the author. The old gentleman trotted away presently and Westwood saw him shake hands with the very man Graham had pointed out. A good deal of laughing and talking ensued between the two, and they seemed well known to each other. "So I can get his name from Blank," Westwood reflected. "I wish I had thought to ask him while he was here, for Graham will very likely forget to find it out for me."

A lull in the conversation around him enabled Westwood to hear what was passing, and his own *nom de plume* attracted his attention.

"Did you say Tressingham, Mr. Blank?" the stranger asked.

"Yes."

"Walter Tressingham by any chance—the author of 'Portia.'"

"The same."

Westwood tried not to listen, but human nature is weak. He held up a newspaper to conceal his face.

"Is Tressingham his real name?" the stranger continued.

"I believe so."

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O

"I am so glad you showed him to me. I had a great curiosity to see him."

"That you might gloat over your victim. Ah, you fellows have a deal to answer for."

"Nonsense—there could not have been a better advertisement."

"Well, it has not proved so," Mr. Blank rejoined, with a grim smile, "as I know to my cost—and so does he. We stood to make a good sum out of 'Portia' if it had pleased the reviewers to speak well of it. But have a care, man, or Tressingham will hear you, and he is as sensitive as any woman."

Westwood would not linger after this. He crossed the room to say good-night to Graham and left the place.

Towards the end of August he received a note from Clare begging him to come down to Shanklin at once as she wished to see him very particularly.

"You will be surprised to hear," she wrote, "that I am engaged to be married. It is to Ralph Conway—you will know whom I mean, though I don't believe you have ever seen him; you go to Aunt Reeve's so seldom. It will have to be a long engagement, for Ralph has little or nothing to do; but I do not mind waiting now I know he loves me. I am afraid you will think it very imprudent. Aunt Reeve was angry at first, and said he had no right to speak to me about love, but he declares he could not help it, seeing me every day as he does down here. I trust and hope you will like him as much as I do—well, not quite that, perhaps, but you will understand. I have told him I will not marry without your consent, though auntie says I can. But she has no idea what you are to me—father, mother, and brother, all in one. There is nobody like you except——"

The sentence was left unfinished, but it was the keynote of the letter. Rupert sighed as he replaced the sheet in its envelope. It was some consolation to think he would not be deprived yet awhile of his home companion (for he had missed her sorely in the last few weeks), but their mutual relations would never be the same again; he could no longer count on his sister's sympathy and undivided attention. How lonely the house would be when she was gone never to return.

But these reflections were selfish and he felt he must not dwell on them. Rupert roused himself and took up another letter that had come by the same post. It was from Mr. Conway, asking for an appointment.

"Your sister's letter will have told you," he said, "what a vitally important question I have to ask you. You hold my happiness in your hands. Do not, I beg of you, keep me long in suspense."

Every line of the letter breathed strong affection for Clare. It was evidently written by a man of education and refinement, and made a very favourable impression on Rupert Westwood. Mr. Conway frankly confessed he had been precipitate. He was not in a position to marry now, and had no immediate prospect of being so. But they were willing to wait, and would be far happier under the assurance of their mutual love than if they were to drift apart.

A photograph had been enclosed in Clare's letter, and Rupert laid it on the table before him and gazed at it intently. It was a pleasant face; that of a young man, seemingly about six-and-twenty; handsome, with clear eyes, a straight nose and fair hair worn rather long. There was just a touch of satire in the set of the lips that Rupert did not like, but he could find nothing else to complain of. The eyes looked out boldly and the expression was honest, if a trifle self-satisfied. And what mortal could help that last when such a precious gift as Clare's love had been newly bestowed on him.

He had certainly never met this Mr. Conway, and yet the features were curiously familiar. As Clare had said, Rupert rarely went to his aunt's house, and knew nothing of her friends. He was grateful for the kindness Mrs. Reeve showed to his sister, but he did not like the old lady and could not get on with her. When asked to her parties, he was wont to plead that his time was too valuable to be spent in accompanying Clare to any house where his presence as an escort was not absolutely necessary.

Rupert had always hoped his sister would make a good match; though he had little right to expect it, seeing she was so poorly endowed. But he had not the heart to withhold his consent on that account, and it was with the full intention of making the lovers happy that he prepared to set out for Shanklin the next day.

At Waterloo Station he fell in with Graham, who was on his way to Southampton to catch the Jersey boat. Westwood's train was to start first, so he induced his friend to come round to the Portsmouth platform for a few minutes. They had not met since the dinner at Graham's club. Westwood told him what his errand was, and, when congratulated on his sister's engagement, confessed there were difficulties in the way.

"I see," Graham rejoined thoughtfully, as he tugged away at his moustache. "A hard case, but common enough, I'm afraid. I'll make the governor put something in the young man's way, if you like—you said he was a barrister, did you not? You can count upon it; for the old boy does anything I ask him. See how the land lies and let me know. But there's the bell—you had better get in. Do you care for an empty carriage? I see one close by."

Rupert took his seat. Graham stood outside and went on talking.

"Oh, by the way," he cried, "Conway you called him, I think. That reminds me. I have had it in my mind a dozen times to tell you Conway was the name of the fellow you asked me about that

night at the club—the critic who writes for the *Burlington*. He was there again a week or two since. Seems a pleasant chap. 'Twould be odd if it should turn out to be the same."

By way of a response, Westwood pulled out the photograph and held it before his friend's eyes. He knew now why the face had puzzled him. Still he encouraged the hope that Graham would not see a likeness. That hope, however, was speedily dispelled.

"By Jove, it's the very man!" Graham exclaimed, with a laugh. "Well, people are always saying the world is small, and I shall certainly begin to believe it. But put the thing up, old fellow, the train is moving. Look me up when you come back, and don't forget my congratulations to Miss Westwood. Good-bye."

Rupert lay back in his seat thinking deeply. Could this man be worthy of Clare's love? Was it possible to let her marry him? Would she wish it herself if she knew all? For the hundredth time Rupert went over in his mind the entire plot of 'Portia,' and tried to discover wherein it merited the censure so lavishly bestowed upon it. He had no wish to close his eyes to the truth; if the criticism were just what matter if it were couched in scathing terms. But in his inmost heart he could not condemn the book. The critic, he argued, had entirely mistaken his meaning. Or, what was more likely, had been carried away by a desire to say a smart thing, and, careless of the consequences, had given full play to his talent for satire. But it was a cruel thing to do, even so, and showed evidence of a nature unfit to be trusted with the happiness of a loving, innocent girl.

For the moment the reflection that he could make or mar this man's fortunes was sweet to the disappointed author. Clare would never marry without his consent—she had said so herself—and that consent he never would give. Ralph Conway dared not press her, for without some assistance—such as Graham had proffered—his success at the bar was next to impossible. That assistance should be denied. And lastly, Westwood was himself a reviewer now, and it would be easy to turn the tables on the young fellow and give him a taste of the lash he was so ready to bestow on other people. He had said his happiness was in Clare's brother's hands, and no truer word had ever been spoken.

The train was late, but Rupert had not decided on any definite plan of action when it drew up at Shanklin Station. Clare was on the platform waiting to receive him. She was alone: a circumstance that surprised as much as it relieved him.

"Such a disappointment!" she cried, as she went forward to greet her brother. "Only fancy—Ralph's clerk telegraphed for him this morning, and he had to leave by the first train. But he will be down again Friday or Saturday, so you won't have long to wait. Dear Rupert, do you know you are not looking at all well. You are so white, and have such dark circles round your eyes. Why did you not tell me? I would have gone home directly."

"I must learn to do without you, dear child," was his evasive rejoinder. "But indeed, Clare, nothing ails me. I need no nursing, I assure you; and if I had, I should not have sent for you just now."

"You will not have to do without me for a long time yet," Clare said, with a tear in her eye and a smile on her lips. "We are not going to marry for years and years. And you may not like Ralph after all. I am awfully afraid you won't; though he admires you immensely."

"Oh, does he?" Westwood said—it must be owned a little satirically. "I fear that does not show his discrimination, Clare. I hope you have not told him much about me—you must not betray my secrets, remember."

"Is it likely," the girl cried indignantly; but indeed, Rupert, I am longing to show him 'Portia' and hear what he thinks of it. I know he will admire it as much as I do—somehow we both like the same books. And he quite understands that things do not always go smoothly, for—didn't I tell you—he writes himself. You see he has such little law business to attend to, and he must make a living. It was aunt Reeve who told him you were an author, not I."

"Luckily she knows nothing about 'Portia.'"

"How sensitive you are, Rupert. But you will let me tell him, won't you?"

Rupert shook his head and his sister saw it was useless to urge him. And there was a want of cordiality whenever he spoke of her lover that made the girl's heart sink.

Old Mrs. Conway, to whom Rupert was for the first time introduced, found him very stiff and cold in his manner. "So different to our warm-hearted Clare," she told her old friend, and both ladies agreed it was a thousand pities Ralph could not marry at once and take his wife away from such uncongenial surroundings.

Mrs. Reeve had a very unpleasant interview with her nephew after Clare had gone to bed that night. If she was satisfied, no one else, she thought, had a right to complain—least of all Rupert, who had not a penny in the world to bestow on his sister. But it was his close inquiries into young Conway's character and antecedents that annoyed her most; for truth compelled her to acknowledge she knew little or nothing about them. She had taken him on his own showing, and when Rupert accused her of imprudence, she had nothing to urge in self-defence. She had boasted so often of the advantage it was to Clare to be under her care that she had laid herself open to the charge.

Rupert would have given much to be able to take himself off before Ralph Conway's return, for it would have been easier to have given him his dismissal away from Clare's pleading eyes, but he could find no valid excuse for so doing, so he yielded to his sister's solicitations and consented to remain at Shanklin over the Sunday.

Ralph came back on Saturday afternoon. Clare tried to induce

her brother to go with her to the station to meet him, but he declared himself too busy, and knowing him to have received a bundle of proof-sheets by that morning's post, she set off with Mrs. Conway, telling him laughingly he would not be left in peace for long, as she meant to bring Ralph in on their way back.

Rupert watched his sister's beaming face as she went up the garden path chatting gaily with her companion. Some indefinable feeling had restrained him from telling her he could not grant her wish, and now that the moment for doing this was at hand, the prospect of bringing a cloud over her young life became exquisitely painful to him. Clare loved this man—therein lay the difficulty. His work, all-important as it was, lay untouched by his side while a bitter struggle went on within. Revenge would be so easy and so complete. The temptation was great, but brotherly love pleaded hard and in the end gained the victory. It might yet be Rupert's duty to forbid the marriage, but never, he resolved, should it be done as a means of self-gratification.

So when Clare's musical laugh warned him she was approaching the house, he rose and, with a beating heart, prepared to receive his future brother-in-law. He had hardly closed his portfolio when she ran in through the open French window.

"There he is," she cried merrily. "Rupert, dear old boy, you really must put away your work for a few minutes! I want you."

"Hush, Clare," he heard Ralph Conway say. "That is not your brother—it is a stranger."

"Nonsense, how should you know? It is he. Come along!"

Her lover hesitated still, but behind the girl's back, Rupert made a sign to him and he said no more. The meeting was rather constrained. In spite of his brave resolution Westwood could not, all at once, hold out his hand in friendship to the man who had blighted his career, and Mr. Conway's usual flow of talk seemed to have deserted him. To put an end to this very uncomfortable state of things Rupert hastened to ask his sister to leave them together for a while, and Clare, wondering what was wrong, withdrew.

The door had scarcely closed behind her when Conway exclaimed:

"So you are Walter Tressingham. I wish I had known it earlier."

"Why so?" demanded Rupert coldly. He was vexed at himself for not being more genial, but his words were not under his own control.

"How am I to ask a favour of you?" Conway rejoined ruefully. "Besides Clare is devoted to you. When she learns that I am the man who has injured you, she will cease to look kindly on me. My dream of happiness is over. When shall you tell her?"

"What made you criticise my book in that strain?" Westwood continued, letting the question pass unheeded.

"Perversity, I suppose—though you must admit your arguments were open to be construed in more ways than one. That the article was used was a mere chance. I should like you to hear the

truth. You must know I was very intimate with Brewster, the late editor of the *Burlington*, and one day, being pressed for money, I asked him, half in joke, if he could not give me a job. 'Well, let me see what you can do!' he said, laughingly. 'Here is a book I have for review; take it home and write me a critique, only remember, no milk and water.' I fear I carried out my instructions too literally; but no one was more surprised than I when that article appeared in print. Brewster, I heard afterwards, had been taken ill suddenly, and either in error or because they were in want of matter, my paper was sent to press. Brewster died, and his successor, a man of a very different stamp, took a fancy to my work and gave me more to do. I cannot tell you how deeply I regret my share in the affair, but of course after what has occurred I cannot expect you to give your sister to me. When shall you tell her?"

"I think, with your concurrence, we will not tell her," Westwood said with a great effort. "I accept your explanation, Mr. Conway. Perhaps, after all, your estimate of my book was the right one, and Clare must never learn the truth. She might forgive, for she loves you, but I doubt if she would ever forget; there would always be something out of tune between you."

"Do you know to what a life you are condemning me?" Ralph Conway cried, his eyes flashing. "Perhaps you do and think it a just punishment for my fault. Of course I shall never convince you the deed was done with no *malice prepense*—though what animus could I have against you; a man whose name, forgive me, I had never heard. Thank you, Mr. Westwood, but dearly as I love your sister, I cannot marry her on those terms. I could not live with such a sword hanging over my head. Some day the story would reach her ears, and then her trust in me would be gone. You will not tell her?" Rupert shook his head. "Then I will and at once." And, without another word, Ralph Conway left the room in search of Clare.

"Do you know, just at first, I thought I must give him up," Clare said to her brother late that same evening as they were wandering along the sea-shore together. "It was hard, though, for—for—I love him dearly, in spite of everything. You have made me so happy, dear, though how you could bring yourself to give your consent is a mystery to me. I could never have done it in your place. But, Rupert—he knew me better than you did. The only way was to tell me all."

* * * * *

Walter Tressingham never wrote another novel, but Rupert Westwood did and made a name for himself before many years had gone by. He can look back on his early struggles with a light heart now. Perhaps the check he met with at the outset of his career has done him no harm in the long run. At any rate he thinks so, and the assurance is a great relief to Clare and her husband.

THE CANON'S INSPIRATION.

AN EPISODE IN RAVENNA.

CURIO collectors of every description will perfectly understand the delight with which my father, Canon Verton, received a letter from Samboni, the Italian art dealer, informing him of the recent discovery of a hoard of Greek coins between Ancona and Fermo, and advising him, if he wished to secure new types for his collection, to start for Italy at once. He wrote further that the matter had been kept very quiet, as the news of the find had only just reached him. An Oxford man who was at Ancona had secured a few coins, but the bulk had been purchased by Count Falconi of Ravenna who was not known as a collector, and therefore had probably bought to sell again as a speculation. If "il Canonico" wished to exchange or buy he had better lose no time in visiting the count, and bring with him among other coins, one of his celebrated specimens of the Gold Stater of Camorina with the full-face head of Sikella, which were the gems of his collection.

Samboni offered to write and introduce my father if he decided to act on this information.

After reading the letter to us at the breakfast-table, we were not surprised to hear the canon begin to plan an immediate departure for Italy as he folded and replaced it in the envelope; but after a few moments' reflection we recollected that the bishop was coming to dine next day (Saturday), and therefore the journey could not be commenced till the following Monday.

My mother, though accustomed to these rapid flights, always made certain representations of the uncomfortable results that might arise from them, and now she reminded him that it was bitterly cold even for an English March; the snow was frozen on the fields, and a keen north wind blowing pierced the thickest coat; bronchitis would certainly attack, perhaps prostrate him in some old Italian inn, and she should worry herself into her grave if he did not write every day; and she begged him to remember the threats of vengeance made by the old Italian coin dealer when he outbid him and bought one of the Gold Staters of Camorina at Castellani's sale in Rome.

My father was a strong man of fifty-seven years; he had never had a cough in his life or a symptom of one, so he laughed and said:

"Mary, my dear, what arrant nonsense! how often have I left you in worse weather and returned safely. No doubt old Caccia is dead; I have not heard of him for months. However, Bertha shall accompany me this time, if it will make you happier, and she shall write to you

frequently and nurse my cold if I get one. Now go, my dear; look out my old Gladstone bag, and examine if it requires repairs. You, Bertha," addressing me, "run off and collect your luggage, and see what you can do without. I can only allow a bag each, and wraps between us. No boxes, my child, an' you love me! I shall write to Samboni directly, asking him to send me full particulars with a letter of introduction to Count Falconi, under cover to his agent in Milan, where we shall stay a night."

As proposed, we left Durham on Monday, and slept at the Grand Hotel that night.

We reached Milan on Tuesday evening in time for the *table d'hôte* dinner, after which my father went off to the agents to inquire for the letter he expected. He returned shortly to tell me Samboni had written, giving him the information that Count Falconi was at his Villa Apulia, and would expect to hear from him immediately he reached Ravenna; adding that it would be best to lose no time in visiting the count, as the news of the treasure-trove was spreading over the country, and the dealers would soon be wishing to share in the profits, and worry the count to sell to them.

Next morning very early we started for our goal as arranged, and reached it in the evening.

We had telegraphed from Milan to the host of the *Spada d'Oro* to meet us with some conveyance, but the carriage he brought appeared to me very like the hood of a bathing machine on high wheels; it was drawn by a pair of cart-horses harnessed with rope.

Seeing we looked surprised, he explained that the vehicle was the best he could get at such short notice, the season for strangers had not yet commenced, and he ended by begging us to excuse his humble conveyance.

The hotel was situated in a narrow side street, and on entering the large gates I thought we must have wandered into the stable-yard, as sheep, cows, goats, and poultry of all kinds scattered, protesting loudly at our approach.

The peal of the bell given by our driver brought a tall, stout, pleasant-looking woman down a wide flight of stairs on one side of the entrance gates, who with great courtesy received us, requesting us to ascend and enter the *Spada d'Oro*, adding that our rooms were quite ready for us, and dinner too.

During our meal we were waited on by both host and hostess, and my father began to make inquiries about Count Falconi, and was told he had only lately bought the villa, three miles out; and when he asked the former if he could send a note to the Villa Apulia, "Yes, certainly," was the answer. He knew the count had just returned from visiting an invalid sister, the Contessa Torino, at Bologna.

A messenger was therefore despatched, and in two hours the reply arrived fixing four o'clock next day for an interview.

After receiving it, we both gladly went to bed, thoroughly tired out with our rapid journey from England.

In the morning my father was busy arranging the coins he had brought with him (which during our journey were carefully hidden in the inner pockets of his vest), and when this was completed we went into the town to see the mosaics in the different churches.

At three o'clock the "bathing machine" came round, and then I found I was to accompany my father. We all sat in a line, on the seat with our driver, who was however raised a little on a sack of straw; this would have been convenient and have enabled us to ask questions *en route*, had we not soon found out that it was quite impossible to understand our guide's Italian. But we discovered presently that he knew a few words of French.

For half an hour we drove through rice fields, no trees or other vegetation to be seen, and the road was straight without a turn—then we came to a grove of pines and a cross road. Our man seemed puzzled which way to go, and drew up to think. After a moment or two, he told us he had forgotten if the padrone had told him to turn to the right or left at the cross road, adding he was a stranger in Ravenna, and had taken the place of a cousin to-day, who was ill with fever and ague. Presently he remembered that he was to take the left-hand road and we started again.

By my watch it wanted ten minutes to four, and we tried to induce our driver to mend the pace of his horses, but though he did his best, he could not persuade them to move quicker than a jog trot, which was monotonous. After another mile we came to a high wall surrounding a large estate, and in a few moments reached a pair of tall richly worked iron gates, with a side wicket at which we drew up. This certainly could not be the front entrance to the villa, but the driver said no doubt it was the back one, and that he must have missed the other; would the signore get down and look for himself? So we both jumped down.

It was evident the gates were seldom opened; they were locked and chained; the side wicket however yielded to the touch, and as our coachman was certain this was our way to the villa, we thought we had better enter and see if we could find a path to the house.

Pine trees grew to within a few yards of the gates, and there were only faint indications of wheel marks on the grass-covered ruts.

Vexed at the idea of being late for his appointment, my father determined to walk on, and telling me to follow him closely, and the man to wait with the carriage till he saw us again, we entered the grounds. Advancing through the trees we soon saw the end of a building which developed in a few seconds into the side wing of a large villa, with towers at each end of the façade and handsome loggias; the walls of these were covered with della Robbia ware, with marble statues before them. Crossing a wide gravel path, we saw a heavy iron-plated door, with white marble steps leading

up to it. On one side hung a long bell handle; was this a back entrance?

My father drew out his watch and found it was nearly half-past four; then he turned to me and said:

"We have no time to lose. I will ring this bell and inquire if Count Falconi is here, and if so I will explain to him the reason we are so late."

A vigorous tug at the bell soon brought a man to open the door, who appeared so hurried that he had not put on his livery coat which he carried on one arm. He was rather a strange-looking object, wearing a waistcoat made of the skin of some animal with the hair outside, and a quantity of long black hair falling over his face. Seeing us, he muttered in very provincial Italian that we were late, and the count was waiting; adding as he looked at me:

"We did not expect a signorina; please to follow me."

"How very extraordinary," whispered my father as we walked behind our guide down a long corridor hung with old tapestry and ancient china vases on carved pedestals. "What does he mean? And he certainly ought to have put on his coat to hide that curious vest!"

During this monologue we had reached a heavy velvet curtain half drawn before an open door towards the extreme end of the long passage; the servant drew this back, and waited at one side till we passed into the room; then he left us and we heard the noise of a spring fastening as he shut the door with a snap.

We had entered a large lofty apartment without windows, but lighted by a domed skylight. The walls were painted in fresco with vividly coloured allegorical subjects, the floor was rough mosaic without carpet or rug. The only furniture consisted of a tall, ivory, inlaid cabinet with folding doors, and a few seats without backs, and on a gilt table against the wall stood a large clock.

As we advanced towards the seats to sit down and wait for a few moments, my eyes fell on a white card lying on the gilt table, which I picked up exclaiming as I held it out, "What is this? Can it be placed here for you?"

Glancing at the card as I gave it to my father, I saw a red spot in the centre of it, with a black circle drawn round, the figure two on the top and S S at the bottom.

My father gave a startled look at it, caught it from my fingers and closely investigated it with compressed lips; then in a moment recovering himself, observed in a whisper: "Ah! the warning sign of that powerful and dreaded secret society the Abruzzi, or Grey Brothers. There is something wrong, Bertha. We are either caught in a trap set by Count Falconi, or this has nothing to do with us, but is intended either for the count or a resident in the villa. It may mean death, or some terrible punishment after the lapse of two days. If it is for me, my arrival in Italy in search of coins has leaked out,

and the society object, or perhaps a leaf in my past has been turned. There is no time to be lost, we must if possible get out of this."

Thus speaking, my father went to the door, but he could not even turn the handle or make any sound on the door which was covered with felt—we were prisoners!

After a few moments we made an examination of our surroundings. My father encouraged me by saying we should presently find another exit, as he had never seen an Italian chamber with only one. We carefully felt the walls with our fingers as high as we could reach, hoping to find a line or crack which might indicate a concealed opening; but in vain. Once or twice I felt inclined to scream, but my father placed his hand on my lips with, "Hush, hush, my child, do not make matters worse!"

As we stood silent after each tour of our prison, the sound of voices reached us faintly, and we could occasionally distinguish bursts of laughter mixed with shouts of applause.

A slight scratching in the tall cabinet attracted my attention, and in a few moments one of the doors was pushed open slowly and a lovely Persian cat crept out and came purring towards me, waving its large tail backwards and forwards.

At once the idea struck me that the cabinet might be placed to hide a passage into another room through which the cat had come, and with one mind we both sprang to examine, when a noise of loud, angry reproaches in the corridor and the rattle of the heavy curtain on its rings made us pause; and with a loud crash the entrance door was flung open, and we turned to face the intruder, who advanced hastily towards us.

He appeared to be a stout, middle-aged man dressed in Parisian style, but his complexion was much darker than his fair, close-cut hair. I noticed his patent-leather boots looked very tight, and his face wore an expression of anxiety. He immediately came up to us with outstretched hands, and began in very imperfect English to explain that he had some friends from Rimini with him to *déjeuner*; afterwards they had amused themselves with billiards, and his man Beppo was afraid to interrupt the party by announcing the arrival of "il canonico" Verton, so had brought him to wait in the only room convenient. Would his illustrious visitor and the signorina, whom he was delighted to welcome, come with him into his study? His guests had left for the railway station, and there was nothing to prevent a quiet inspection of the coins he had to show and examine.

The sudden relief to my apprehensions of the last half hour made me feel giddy and faint, and I almost fell into the count's arms; but my father caught me, and supported by him I was taken into the study, when I was placed in a low chair by the warm stove full of burning wood. In a very short time I recovered myself, and began to wonder why my father appeared cold and unwilling to reciprocate the warm greeting given us, hardly noticed the voluble apologies

which fell like a torrent from our host's lips, and merely bent his head in reply.

Directly the count noticed I was well again he brought me an English paper which was only four days old and begged me to excuse him if he commenced his business with "*il signore canonico*."

I settled myself back in my chair and began to read my paper, but I could not help glancing from it frequently to watch my father's face, which continued to look so stern; then my thoughts wandered to the man Beppo, and I wondered if the country nobles in Italy always kept such provincially-dressed servants with unusual waistcoats and thick boots with heavy wooden soles.

The chink of silver drew my attention towards the coin-exchangers, who had just commenced business. The table was covered with little boxes containing packets of white paper, in each of which, folded so as not to touch each other, were the most valuable and best preserved specimens. Leather bags were emptied of their contents on to brass trays, and the coin dealing began. The men with the tips of their fingers moved the bulky heaps and skilfully turned each coin over on the trays, and then picked out any particular type they sought of the silver money; the gold was carefully folded in the white papers and kept in the little boxes.

Presently I heard the count inquire if the canon would allow him to see his gold staters which he had brought with him.

My father answered by informing him that he had only one, and that he bought at Castellani's sale last year; and taking it out of a little case he handed it over. I noticed the count's fingers close over it tightly while he in a careless tone inquired the price.

"I shall never sell it," was the answer; "it has no price."

"You bought it too cheap, *signore*; old Caccia was a fool to let you outbid him!" was the surprising exclamation, almost shouted by Count Falconi. "I offer you twice the money you gave, but we intend to have the coin with or without your consent."

"What do you mean, sir? Give me back the coin immediately, or I shall doubt if I am addressing Count Falconi."

"Well, you need not doubt. I am not the count, but his foster-brother and valet, Victor Caccia. It was my grandfather you robbed of this gold stater."

Both men were now speaking loudly and vehemently.

As I sprang up to rush to my father's side the false count blew a shrill whistle, and the next moment Beppo entered. His coat was thrown back, and in his waistband glittered a knife. He thrust me back, when Caccia cried out:

"We only ask for our own and will pay you well. If the *signorina* makes a noise we will lock her up in the *entresol* and gag you and tie your hands and feet," he continued, looking at my father. "You will probably die of starvation, as there is no one in the villa. My master is still at Bologna; he is waiting till I inform him of your

arrival. I answered your letter sent last night. We intend to have the coin or your life. Will you sell it?"

"Never! never!" cried the canon, flourishing his stick over his head (which had been placed on the chair at his side) and waiting for the attack. I covered my face with my hands and sank back in my chair; but the silence which fell over the storm induced me to rise, and looking at my father I saw a flash of inspiration pass over his face, and with a curious smile he pulled something out of his pocket and threw it towards the valet, saying:

"Be careful how far you go; I am, as you see, protected by the Abruzzi. Act as you please. I shall be avenged."

The paper fell open on the table, and I recognised the token I had given my father.

Years have passed, but I shall never forget the look of intense horror with which the two men regarded it, and then both threw themselves prostrate on the floor and implored the illustrious Brother of the Abruzzi to pardon them and to represent to the members that they had always been devoted to their interests, and if their lives were spared they would accept any punishment awarded; that they acknowledged they had made a mistake, not being aware the canonico was one of the guild; but he could command them, and they would obey without making the slightest resistance.

During this speech which was made by Caccia on his knees, my father had gathered together his coins and replaced them in his case, taking up last the gold stater which had dropped from the paralysed fingers of the false count. Then he said:

"You can rise both of you. I will not promise anything, but the representations I make to the Abruzzi will depend on your conduct now. You, Victor Caccia, will promise to remain in this room for two hours, and I shall tie your hands behind you."

Cutting a length of the cord which drew the curtains together, he carried into effect his sentence. Caccia made no resistance, and appeared quite incapable of offering it. Beppo was then ordered to give up his knife, and walk before us out of the room (which was locked and bolted). He waited trembling till this was done. Then, as my father approached him he made a rush to fell him and escape, but his attempt was frustrated by his stumbling over the Persian cat, and with one blow my father knocked him down. We were at that moment passing the room we had first entered, so he was rolled inside and locked in.

"Now, Bertha, we must run for our lives. Take my arm and hold tight; we must get out of Villa Apulia before those scoundrels recover their senses sufficiently to help each other."

At the iron gates we found our driver calmly smoking on the carriage seat. Lifting me in and jumping up himself, my father ordered the man to drive as quickly as possible back to Ravenna as the signorina was indisposed, whispering to me to be silent till we were

safe in the *Spada d'Oro*. Then taking a cigar out of his case he lighted it, and in silence we drove to the entrance-gates of our hotel.

Our host was waiting for us, and his pleasant smiling wife stood at the top of the stairs. She was distressed to see me looking pale and ill, and said I had caught a chill; it was very dangerous to be out after sunset on account of the malaria; if I wished to avoid an attack of fever I must go to bed and take a strong hot tisane which she kept always ready.

She half carried me into my room, set the wood in the stove alight, undressed and helped me into my bed, and then brought the decoction and made me drink it. No doubt there was some sedative in it, for I fell asleep almost directly, and did not wake till nearly ten o'clock, when I found my father sitting by my bed and watching me anxiously; he inquired how I felt and if I could listen to him for a few moments. I really was quite calm and ready to rise and go anywhere; my sleep had restored me to my usual health.

When he was assured of this he told me that the sooner we left Ravenna the better, and he intended, if I had sufficiently recovered, to leave by the early train in the morning, take tickets for Rome, but leave at the next junction for Turin, where we should remain to-morrow night and reach Paris the day after. He had already written home, warning my mother not to write till she received a fresh address.

I then inquired how he had become acquainted with the existence of the Abruzzi Secret Society, and where he had learnt to recognise their signs. He placed his hand before my mouth and replied:

"Do not name them. I can only tell you this. Years back, directly I left Oxford I became travelling tutor to Lord Medhurst, and in Sicily we were betrayed into their hands and kept prisoners for three months. A young Swiss peasant from love of adventure had joined the band of brigands with which Sicily is infested; he was made responsible for my safe keeping, but he had grown sick of the life and proposed to me an escape at the first opportunity. From him I gathered that the brigands were members of a secret society, and he explained the warnings and rules as far as he had been initiated. An unsuccessful military raid drove the banditti towards the coast at Messina, and here poor Medhurst by his rashness lost his life. One dark night, soon after his death, Ludwig Fels and I swam to the steam yacht of an American in the harbour, who brought us both to England within a week; he landed me at Dover, but Fels would not leave his protector and attached himself as a steward to the yacht. I have never heard of him since.

"The secret society gather some of their income from the brigands, and till this society is broken up, brigandage will never be exterminated in Sicily. After this experience I determined that I would never visit Italy again, but when I began coin-collecting and my remembrance of the past grew fainter, I met Samboni, the Italian

art dealer. He persuaded me that Italy was the "happy hunting-ground" of the numismatist, and I was induced to revisit Rome and the other cities I had once known so well. I cannot fathom the object of this plot against me this afternoon, but I am sure your unexpected presence in some way disarranged the programme. Count Falconi himself may have been in the villa, and I suspect that he intended robbery or worse. Caccia was probably the 'cat's paw.' The visitors from Rimini, perhaps, were guests invited by the count, and one of them could have placed the warning sign where you saw it, as only an accident would disclose even to a near relative that one of the family was a brother of the Abruzzi. All the members of the Falconi household may be suspected of some treachery or implicated in forbidden revolutionary schemes and therefore doomed to destruction by the high officials of the guild. I only hope Caccia and Beppo will disappear before they can mention my part in the drama; but remember in any case to keep silence about all that has occurred. Our lives may depend on it. Now go to sleep again, my brave little daughter." And, with a good-night kiss, my father left me.

As arranged we started early next morning from Ravenna and slept at Turin; the following night we were safely settled in the *Hôtel Bristol*, Paris. My father went to the British Embassy and laid the circumstances before the ambassador, who promised to inform the French police and English detectives employed by the Embassy, but we experienced a great relief in a day or two when we read in the *Secolo*, an Italian paper, that Count Falconi of Ravenna had been burnt to death in his Villa Apulia; his remains were recognised by his watch-chain and the coins attached to it. The whole of the residents of the Villa were supposed to have perished, and the fire was the work of an incendiary.

After reading the account, the canon observed: "Well! the Abruzzi only know if the count is dead or alive—if the last, he has destroyed his identity to save his life."



DREARY MEN.

OUR life is a strange mingling of joy and grief, of pleasure and pain, of mirth and melancholy ; and God, knowing the sorrow that must form the larger portion of our earthly lot, mercifully relieved it by an occasional gleam of sunshine, to gild the lowering cloud and lighten up the gloom. He conferred upon us—in most cases at least—a sense and susceptibility of the humorous, a perception and power of appreciating the droll or whimsical side of things. Were it not for this, our pilgrimage here would indeed be a sad and almost intolerable experience, and we have to thank Him for such temporary alleviation of its miseries.

“What !” you cry : “do you make God—so great and glorious, so sublime and awful a Being—the author of anything but the profoundest gravity ?”

Yes, without the slightest scruple or hesitation. He wished and intended us to be bright and happy. He taught us to smile as well as to weep (did He teach us the latter at all ?) ; and smiles were not only given for the expression of love and good-will, but also sometimes as the indication of harmless mirth and merriment.

When I say merriment, I mean of a sober kind, such as becomes rational and responsible creatures ; and when I speak of smiles, I do not include loud and boisterous laughter, which is a coarse and vulgar emotion ; nor do I believe that such is known or ever indulged in in worlds which are not fallen like our own, for there is nothing that more grates upon the feelings or shocks and distresses the ear.

I am induced to venture upon these remarks because there is a morose and wretched set of mortals, cold and austere by nature, who would banish everything in the shape of lightheartedness and humour altogether from the scene ; blot out the sunshine and leave us only the shade ; trample on and destroy the flowers ; empty out the milk from the nut, and present us with the dry husk.

Let me not be mistaken here ; there is a time for seriousness, and levity at such moments would be an impertinence. The man who would force his high spirits and hilarity upon you when in church, or by a sick bed, or at a funeral, or when care and anxiety distress and cloud the brow, or when common decency requires a composure of countenance, is unfit for society, and deserving of a sharp reprimand. I simply contend that, in a general way, and when there is no particular necessity for a contrary course of behaviour, the play of humour and the flash of wit—so long as they are not made personal and offensive—are not to be regarded as an improper indulgence or intrusion. The kindest and best men the world has known have been

the most cheerful, even under adverse circumstances, and the most capable of enjoying a little seasonable pleasantry. I could quote hundreds of instances.

I have been led to make these remarks, I said, because one meets now and then with a dull and dreary man, a being of a sour and morose disposition, without a spark of humour, with no imagination, whose presence has a tendency to damp and depress the spirits, to check all gaiety of heart and recreative conversation. I lately met with one, though they are by no means rare. He was a clerical brother too. Our discourse, after the business of the day had been gone through, turned, naturally enough, upon lighter topics, though still such as might be supposed of sufficient interest at times to engage the thoughts and awaken the sympathies of the most religious person on earth.

Some one present had offered a speculative remark as touching the probable pursuits and enjoyments of heaven, and ventured to suggest that mirth and amusement, though of a higher kind than anything known here, were not incompatible with celestial tastes and aspirations. The gloomy divine before alluded to, frowned, grew irritable, tried to put a stop to any further discussion of the subject, and withdrew his chair as far as he could from the friendly circle, manifesting at the same time a strong inclination to rush to the hall and reach his hat. He maintained that flinging down our crowns and falling at the foot of the throne, with endless services of psalm and thanksgiving, were all that could be expected or required. Nothing had occurred to ruffle this man; he was naturally crabbed and cross-grained, doleful and dole-infecting, and as such, you will say, worthy more of our pity than our displeasure, but who would seek his company, or sigh for his acquaintance? Harsh and overbearing abroad, stern and disagreeable at home, he did a great deal of mischief to the cause of the religion he professed, by persuading all with whom he came in contact—indirectly if not directly—that in spite of the doctrine the Scriptures carefully inculcate her ways are certainly *not* those of pleasantness, nor her paths altogether those of peace.

Dry and dreary men! you meet with them everywhere, indoors and out, in public life and in private, in the pulpit and on the platform, by river and by rail. They cannot be happy themselves, and they will not allow others to be so, if they can help it.

For a second instance and example, I was travelling a short time since, and there chanced to be an individual of this objectionable type seated in the railway carriage beside me, who seemed to delight in snapping up and snubbing every effort at sprightliness on the part of his fellow-passengers, and glowering uncomfortably ever and anon upon them from his corner.

Presently in got a brisk, daintily-dressed, good-looking young fellow (I took him for a lawyer's clerk) who was on agreeable terms with himself, and wished to be with all the world. It was a grand gala

day at a neighbouring town. He fixed a friendly eye upon the surly passenger opposite, and asked, with a complacent smirk, "Are you going to the Fêtes?"—drolly pronouncing the word "*Fêtes*."

The other, without returning his kindly glance, but keeping his gaze savagely fixed upon the distant country, replied, in a gruffer tone than I ever heard to proceed from any lips but those of a grizzly bear, "No;" and the poor youth, utterly extinguished, sank forthwith into his socket.

Now, however simple and homely the remark volunteered, it was shocking rudeness—nay, downright brutality—to wound the joyous feelings of another by a curt rough answer like this, and the man who does it deserves as severe a set down in his turn.

In direct contrast to this anecdote illustrative of a man's native surliness of temper, and his inability—or settled determination not—to view matters in their better and brighter light, let me—changing the sex this time—relate another little adventure which befel me during the same journey by rail, as it serves also in its turn as an admirable illustration of that quick perception of the droll, that keen sense and appreciation of the humorous, already alluded to, which helps so much to lighten life's load of sorrow, and put people on good terms with all that befalls them.

Just opposite me sat two ladies, one comely and buxom, the wife probably of some well-to-do farmer or tradesman; the other, by the likeness, her maiden sister, but a confirmed invalid, slight, pale, wasted away, yet still kindly-looking, and travelling to Rhyl for the benefit of the sea air. "Poor thing!" said I to myself, "the slightest shock to her nervous system would certainly kill her; a breath would blow her away." I repeated this compassionately to myself several times at intervals. "A sudden start, a slight shock, a mere breath—and she would be gone."

Presently I rose to my feet with the intention of seeing that my black bag, which I had placed in the network cratch overhead, was quite safe. At that moment the train, having delivered itself of sundry creaks and groans, indicative of a desire to stop, gave a tremendous jolt, which precipitated me—off my guard as I was—with the terrific impetus of a sixty-eight pound shot from a battery right into the lap of the delicate female in front of me; while a simultaneous avalanche on the part of the black bag from above threatened her total annihilation.

Glancing hastily downward to estimate the amount of damage, I saw that her body, which was crouched forward, had suffered a frightful collapse; and I feared all was over. "Yes," murmured I, "she is killed; I have done it!" And raising her form gently, I gazed sympathisingly into her face; when, to my intense relief and astonishment, instead of in the agonies of death, I found her (her friend also) in perfect convulsions of mirth, which communicated itself gradually to all the other passengers—with the sole exception

of the surly individual who had clapped the extinguisher over the young man bound for the "*Feets*."

My heart warmed towards this delightful woman. "Yours is indeed a happy temperament, madam," I said, "which enables you to meet the ills of life with such charming equanimity; and I wish all"—with a meaning look at the sour passenger—"were half as fortunate." But the reference to the accident set herself and sister off again; and every time, for an hour afterwards, that our glance met, they were both suddenly and similarly seized.

Turning now—not from the grave to the gay, but from the gay to the grave, from the lively to the severe—let me give another picture, though perhaps a less repulsive one than either of the two previously painted, of a man to whom nature seemed to have denied that *suaviter in modo*, that charm of manner, that nameless grace, and element, and attribute, which renders almost every action of our life wholesome and pleasant.

I was once, being appointed deputation for a certain Benevolent Society, invited to stay the night at the house of a rich banker. He was a good and well-meaning man enough, in the broader sense, but he never smiled or looked amiable once during the whole evening, nor made one enlivening remark. Dinner was like the biscuit and glass of wine before a funeral; his features never relaxed, his family sat in awe around. I made an effort or two to brighten them up, but they were signal failures, though one son and a daughter looked gratefully at me for a moment, then, finding their father unmoved, quickly straightened their features again into the old quakerly expression. There had been many interesting anecdotes related by different speakers at the meeting, but he listened to them all, grave as the Sphinx, and a far less sightly object.

Towards bedtime, seven servants, male and female, filed one after the other into the room, accompanied by a red-faced jubilant lad in silver buttons, who had to be frowned down into a fitting state of decorum. A form having been arranged close to the wall, they placed themselves sepulchrally upon it, and opened their Bibles. Their master now gave a preparatory glance round, and observing that a dog belonging to the establishment had surreptitiously crept in and taken up his position under a chair, ordered him to be turned out (I noticed that the butler kicked him privately on the other side of the door), then read, in a slow and inexpressibly dismal and monotonous manner, and in scarcely audible tones, the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, consisting, as we know, of no fewer than seventy-five verses. Beautiful and touching as the Scripture narrative would have proved in other hands, we all felt very much inclined, like Peter himself, to "weep bitterly" at the end of it. This pious and praiseworthy man next proceeded to supplement the lengthy chapter with a prayer more lengthy still, and in a tone ten degrees more dismal and lugubrious; at the close of which three

only of the seven servants arose from their knees, the others having to be awakened with thumps by the butler and coachman, who coughed a good deal during the process, and seemed glad to get out of the room.

"Come back!" cried their master, with a vigorous pull at the bell. "None of you said 'Good night.'" And each had to reappear and invoke this benediction upon our heads.

I was not sorry, five minutes later (my hostess's obliging proposal for a little music having been quietly ignored), to be presented with a cold brass candlestick, and allowed to say "Good night" too.

I have reserved this prosperous banker to the last, as I thought him about the dreariest specimen of the dreary man that I ever met with in my life. There is quite enough of the sad and sombre, as I have already hinted, in this our mortal pilgrimage, without one's studying to add to it; and it should be the aim and object and good pleasure of every really unselfish person (who is not the victim of some sudden stroke of affliction, or otherwise incapacitated for the performance of his duty as a meet and worthy member of the human family) to maintain a cheerful demeanour himself, and endeavour to promote a kind and genial state of feeling among others, "rejoicing with them that do rejoice," and at the same time not forgetting "to weep with them that weep."

LINDON MEADOWS.



IS THIS LOVE?

O MARY, do not wed this man,
Although you loved him in your youth;
Love surely is not love unless
It roots in tender truth.

How oft you told the piteous tale
Of this man's wild and squandered days;
His deeds of which you would not hear
Because you could not praise.

Of all his mother's wasted pleas,
Who died in grief when she was old;
And of the bride he left you for,
Because he sought her gold.

"Poor pretty lass!" (you called her once),
Whom he drew down to loss and shame,
Until the very death she died
You scarcely care to name!

You've heard him curse her, while he dared
To hint re-wakened love to you
Now she is gone. Across her grave
Is it fit place to woo?

Think of that mother's darkened days!
Think of that thrice unhappy wife!
Nor of these women's broken hearts
Make trophies for your life.

"Repentant"—say you? Then I trow
He will not bring you his decay!
He'd rather bless you as a star,
Lighting a lonely way.

Facing dead mother and dead wife,
Old wasted love—dare you this thing?
Melting the cup of Holy Grail
To a mere wedding-ring?

But Mary smiled her subtle smile:
"The truth was never to you shown,"
She answered. "Each has but his day,
And each must live his own."

ISABELLA FVIE MAYO.



"HOW OFT YOU TOLD THE PITEOUS TALE
OF THIS MAN'S WILD AND SQUANDERED DAYS . . ."

TWO POINTS OF VIEW.

(BEING EXTRACTS FROM THE POST-BAG OF TEMPLEMORE GRANGE,
BLANKSHIRE.)

BY NORAH McCORMICK.

EXTRACT I.

MY DEAR LUCILLA,—The telegram, so startling both to you and to myself, which, by summoning me to my brother's house, broke off my all-too-happy visit to you, was caused by a missive of the same order from poor Mary at Cannes, who, being again seized with "La Grippe," felt the need of her devoted husband's sustaining presence. I arrived to find him gone, and only the children and servants at the Grange. The children have, no doubt, suffered much from the absence of their mother, and have run wild since Miss Pearson was so summarily dismissed, and Tom, who is always so much occupied in literary pursuits as to be a somewhat negligent parent, has allowed them too much of their own way.

Phyllis is terribly blunt and outspoken, while Jack has a bad habit of laughing immoderately for no apparent cause, however, I see very little of either.

I feel I must mention a cause of discomfort to me which took place last night. After dinner, the children, of course, being in bed, I occupied myself very pleasantly in reading 'The Gentle Life' (your gift, dear friend), and in trying a new pattern of knitted chest-preservers, intended for the Deep Sea Mission, and sat up absorbed in the intricacies of the design until eleven o'clock.

I was on my way upstairs when a strange sound reached me. How shall I describe it? You will say I was dreaming, but I assure that the whole basement rang with a sound resembling the fluttering of mighty wings. I called out, "Dobson, what is that?" and as there was no answer hastened to the pantry, and found him asleep there, with the *Times*, for which I had previously searched in vain that evening, over his face. I wakened him with difficulty, and he assured me that he had heard nothing at all, and as I detected a slightly supercilious smile on his face when I enlarged on my alarm, I said no more, but went to my room. I sleep on the first landing in the new wing, with the library underneath me, and unoccupied bed-rooms next to mine, and felt a little nervous and lonely, as I should have to traverse two corridors to reach even the children's rooms, and the servants are, of course, much higher up.

I was just composing myself to sleep, and was in the act of

picturing a flock of sheep passing through a gap in a hedge (a sure way, as you know, to slumber), when I heard, indistinctly, the same whirring sound as before; it rose and fell, and swelled and decreased, and I could not tell whence it proceeded. I covered my head, but still heard it. It must have continued for an hour; then all was still. I have questioned the servants to-day, but none own to having heard it, and I really think they know nothing of the matter, but I shall insist upon Susan sharing my room to-night. Not that I am so weak-minded as to give way to superstitious fear, but I will not pass another such night of terror and discomfort.

Your attached friend,

OLIVIA MERTON.

EXTRACT II.

DEAREST MOLLY,—Daddy went off the day before yesterday, and Aunt Olivia came here to take care of us. We are not doing any lessons because Miss Pearson has gone. Daddy had to go to France because mother is ill again, and they won't be home for months.

We are enjoying ourselves awfully, for we have made such a delightful discovery. I am going to tell you all about it, for I know you and the boys would enjoy it too. First I must tell you how we discovered it. It was two days before Daddy went, and it was so dull, because he had told us we were not to wade in the ponds any more. We had been having lovely fun there, playing at magic mere, and Jack was King Arthur and got Excalibur out, but that horrid cat, Susan, found us just as Jack had thrown it into a splendid position, and she would not even let him bring it out once again, because, she said, it spoiled his clothes! Now the rain has come and washed it far into the water, and we shall never get it again. Well, as I was saying, we felt very dull, and even Jack was getting rather cross till I suddenly thought of a most amusing game, which was that we should dress up as two old women, and call on Daddy for a subscription—he hates it so! We had not seen him all day, because a whole bundle of leaves out of his book came that morning, and he did not even come in to lunch, so we thought it would pay him out beautifully. We went to mother's room and got all we wanted. Jack did look funny in an evening dress all pink silk, and mother's Indian shawl over it. I had on a long cloak, and did my hair just like Miss Pearson; we both had veils on, and I carried the butcher's book for the subscription list.

We made Dobson show us in, and Daddy got up, looking frightfully cross, and said, as if he were trying to be polite, "What can I do for you, madam?" All the leaves the printer had sent him were lying about the table—Daddy is very untidy—and he had been writing things all down the spaces at the sides, and I was looking at them, and so I did not answer quite at once, and just as I was going to speak Jack gave it all away by bursting out laughing (that's the worst of Jack, he

can never keep serious). So of course Daddy knew it was us, and he was very angry, and said most unkind things about our always interrupting his work, and that we were most unfeeling, and that he was going to punish us; and so he did, for he locked us into that horrid, stupid little room where he develops photographs. All the things were locked into the cupboard in there, so we could not even find any amusement by trying experiments with the chemicals, and there was only one chair to sit on. Jack sat on the floor, and as Daddy had spilt a lot of water there, it spoilt mother's pink gown, but that wasn't our fault. We were dreadfully dull, and if it had not been for a book Daddy had left there by mistake, I don't know how we should have got through the afternoon. It was only one of his stupid books—no story or anything of that sort—and it is most lucky we found it there, for we should never have thought of looking at it any other time, and it was through this that we made our new and beautiful discovery, the "Bull-Roader."

That was what the man who wrote the book called it; there was a whole chapter about it, and after he had written a lot of rubbish about its being noisy, and breaking things if one were not careful, just like all grown-up people talk, he told you how to make it.

Unfortunately we can't find the book again to be quite sure that we have the measurements quite correctly, but I think these are the right directions. Get a piece of wood—the book said the lid of a packing-case was the right thickness—and cut a strip eight inches long and four inches wide—there were some pictures of bull-roarers in the book, and they seem to be broad in the middle, and get narrow at each end, almost into a point—then make a hole in it, and tie in a bit of string thirty inches long, and all is ready. You swing it in the air, and it makes far more sound than you would ever believe. It is lovely!

The book said that savages somewhere or other use it to call the men to church, and keep the women away—women don't seem to go to church out there, which is queer—and the ancient Greeks used it at their mysteries. Well, of course, we determined to keep it a mystery too, for everybody would be sure to say we would hurt ourselves with it, or break something, and, besides, mysteries are so nice. The awkward part of it is that the book said if a woman saw it there would be a flood, and drown the world, so Jack said it would be no good to me. I thought, perhaps, it would not matter for me, as I am only a little girl, but Jack was very particular about it, and we had to think out a plan.

But first we had to get out of that stuffy little room, where Daddy had left us so long, and we managed this by shouting for Dobson till he luckily heard us, and undid the door; then I went to the library, and called through a crack to Daddy that we could not stand being shut up any more, but that we would be quiet, and not disturb him again, so he said, "All right, go away at once," and I did, and found Jack cutting up a piece of wood he found in Daddy's work-shop—

a nice, smooth piece, ready for that carving stuff Daddy is always doing—and I got the string, and helped him, for he thought it would not matter for me to see it until it was quite made. We had to stop in the middle to go in to tea, and it took us till bed-time to finish it, but it was done at last, and Jack only cut himself twice; then I turned my back, and he tied in the string, and was just going to try it when Susan came out and called us, and said it was past our bed-time, so we had to go, for Mother made Daddy promise to be particular about our not stopping up late.

I was nearly asleep when Jack came into my room in his stockings softly, and pulled my hair. I jumped and nearly screamed, but he pinched me and told me to shut up; then he said he had thought of a lovely plan for me. I was to go down to the cellar where it was quite dark, and try the bull-roarer; I could not see it there at all, he said. "But mayn't I try it here? It is dark enough for anything." "Yes, it is dark," Jack said, "but Susan is in the next room, and she will hear you. I've been trying it in the bath-room, and it was splendid, but Daddy came up-stairs, so I had to stop and slip back. I suppose you would be frightened to go to the cellar, though; I forgot you're only a girl!"

Of course after that I got up at once, and took the bull-roarer and slipped downstairs. I found the key of the cellar in the door, and so I got in and went down the steps; it was rather awkward, and though I would not tell Jack for anything I was rather afraid of rats. However, I shut the door and began to practice. I worked for ages, but could make no sound, and only hit my head with it, so at last I had to creep back upstairs and give it up. I saw the library door was open—the cellar is underneath the library—and I was dreadfully afraid Daddy might see me, but his back was turned, so I escaped safely. I found Jack in my room laughing to himself, and told him it was no use. "You did not try long enough," he said; "the book told us no noise came at first. Never mind, I'll do it for you to-morrow, and then you'll hear it; we can't do anything now. Good night." He went back to his room, and I had to go to sleep without hearing it.

Next day Daddy got the telegram from mother, and as Aunt Olivia did not come till the evening we had lots of time to do as we liked, so we went into the wood, and I sat behind a tree so that I could not see while Jack swung the bull-roarer. He did it awfully well with a little practice, and we were both delighted, but it seems to me that Jack has all the best of it. That night Aunt Olivia sat up so late that I knew I should be asleep before she came up, so at last I waited no longer, but slipped down. I put on slippers, so did not feel afraid of rats, and I made a splendid noise.

The cellar is under the library, as I have just said, and far from the drawing-room, so I felt safe. Dobson was still up, but I saw him asleep in his pantry—he is so lazy!

I stayed a long time, and only stopped swinging while Auntie was in the hall, and going upstairs, and when I had finished I could do better than Jack!

Just fancy! Aunt Olivia wanted to know if we felt nervous at night, and if I would like to sleep with her, and Jack sleep next door! How we laughed! As if we should be afraid in our own house. Of course we refused.

Your loving cousin,

PHYLLIS.

EXTRACT III.

MY DEAR LUCILLA,—I write in great disturbance, and am more thankful even than usual to pour out to you. You may remember what I lately wrote you concerning the mysterious noise which broke my rest and upset my nerves so much the other night?

Last night, according to my already mentioned determination, I arranged that Susan, a very quiet and superior young woman, should sleep in my room. Before the other servants went to bed, I insisted that search should be made throughout the house, from attic to cellar, and even every cupboard well examined, so that no possible outsider should be concealed anywhere, and having done this I retired, accompanied by Susan. We were scarcely upstairs, and Susan was still brushing my hair, when the dreadful sound began again. It was absolutely louder than before, and I could almost have been sure that it was just below us. It resembled some gigantic machinery in motion, except that it rose and fell in waves of sound, and ceased altogether, every now and then, for a breathing-while, only to begin again more vigorously than before. Susan turned perfectly white, and dropped the brush with an exclamation I should be sorry to repeat. She now quite understood my fright and distress, which, beforehand, I regret to say, she had treated with as much levity as she dared to show. She declared that she had never heard such a sound before, and that nothing would persuade her to go down with me, as I proposed, and search the house. She greatly lamented that all the rest of the household slept so far off, and earnestly wished she had courage to go for help to them. Alas, I was also lacking in this virtue, and we remained for a full hour trembling, and chill with dread of we scarce knew what, till, all having been quiet for some ten minutes, I felt that my duty as guardian of my brother's innocent babes, compelled me to visit their rooms, and see that they were not hurt or alarmed.

Followed by Susan, almost weeping with fright, I went to Jack, and found him indeed asleep, but with a long and apparently recently-made scar on his forehead. I tried to wake him, but could not do so sufficiently to obtain any information as to the cut, which he said was "nothing," so I merely applied cold cream, and left him,

and went on to Phyllis. She was buried under the clothes, and I immediately concluded that she had been alarmed. I raised her gently on to the pillows, and she opened her eyes sleepily, and asked what was wrong. I explained that her head had been covered, which was most unhealthy, and she replied that she was cold, and indeed I now perceived that she was shivering. "My dear little girl," I said, "hide nothing from me. I fear that you are nervous sleeping alone, and if so, I will gladly stay with you." Upon which, she was rude enough to burst out laughing, and begged me to go away, and not talk nonsense. I administered a dose of camphor, and was at last persuaded to leave her, though in much anxiety, and go to bed. I am glad to say that only the snores of Susan were to be heard after this, but the shock to my nerves drove sleep from me till dawn.

To-day the household is thoroughly roused by Susan's report of last night. They pay more attention to her than they did to me, and Dobson has announced his intention of sitting up all night in order to investigate. I have given strict orders that not a word of all this is to be mentioned before the children, and, so far, I have no reason to suspect that they have disobeyed me. I am really anxious about Phyllis. I went to her room as soon as I rose, and found her in a high fever, and I am keeping her in bed to-day, by order of Dr. Wellman, who called to see her at my request. He comforts me by his assurance that it is only a chill, and she is very tractable, and is doing all I tell her. Jack's cut forehead is as mysterious as Phyllis's chill; as I told you, he has a bad habit of laughing at nothing, and, when I questioned him as to his accident, the only answer I got was a foolish giggle, so I simply leave the boy alone. I must go to my dear little invalid, so adieu.

Yours ever,

OLIVIA MERTON.

EXTRACT IV.

DEAREST MOLLY,—Excuse pencil, please, because I am kept in bed just for a little cold, and Aunt Olivia is in and out so much that it is nearly impossible to write at all, only I promised to let you know how the bull-roarer gets on. Well, last night I went down again as soon as everyone was in bed, and Jack came too, for he cannot hear it, of course, from his room, and he wanted to know how I got on. He was awfully pleased when he found how well I did it, but, unfortunately, in the dark, he got a bit too near, and it hit his head, and cut it rather badly, for the wood is hard, so he left me, and went to bed, and when I came up he was sound asleep. Just fancy my lucky escape!

I had hardly got into my bed before Aunt Olivia come prying into my room, and though I got under the clothes she undid me, and asked me—what do you think? If I was nervous and would like her

to sleep with me! It is my belief *she* is nervous herself! I *did* laugh, but my teeth would chatter, and she found out how cold I was, for it is very damp in the cellar, so she stayed fussing for ages. I really have a bad cold to-day, though not so bad as auntie thinks. I actually heard her ask Dr. Wellman if she should send for Daddy! Of course he stopped her. Here she comes! What a bother! I must stop.

Your loving
PHYLLIS.

EXTRACT V.

MY DEAR LUCILLA,—I can now write more cheerfully. Phyllis is almost well, and is up again, and the mysterious, horrible sound is heard no longer. Dobson sat up for two nights in succession, and as all was quite still, he again quite discredits our story.

Susan is very nervous, but I am now almost reassured, and though the cause of our fright is not accounted for, still we need not mind so long as it does not occur again.

* * * * *

Alas! I wrote all too hopefully. Last night matters were as bad as ever. The dreadful whirring sound commenced as soon as we reached our rooms, and was continued for quite an hour. The unfortunate part, too, was that Dobson had had an accident that same evening, for as he was descending the cellar steps in order to decant some wine, he caught his foot in some string and fell, badly spraining his ankle, so he was quite unable to stir from his room, which he only reached with much difficulty and the help of George, the groom.

Cook is a sensible woman, and with her help I determined to examine the house at once. So we four women—for Susan and I went and roused the other two—descended the stairs, though, as I pointed out, the chances of our surprising a hidden enemy were but faint while Jane and Susan shrieked and wept as they did. It might have been fancy, but I thought I heard a rustle in the corridor on the first landing where the children sleep, but we found nothing there, and all downstairs was peaceful and quiet.

Phyllis has begged that we will not visit her at night—she says it disturbs her rest, so we had to trust to the children's safety, and return to our rooms; which we did, much shaken and troubled, Susan in particular, who had a fit of hysterics, and vowed that she would leave next day—a determination she clings to in spite of all that cook and I can say. It is very trying. Dear me! As I write Jane comes and insists on leaving with Susan. What shall we do? Dobson is unable to stir, and except for cook we have no servant in the house. I do not know what to do. I do not like to engage any stranger without consulting my brother, and cannot do that while he is so much concerned about Mary, whose health is most critical.

EXTRACT VI.

DEAREST MOLLY,—I am well enough to practise the bull-roarer again. How I wish I might see it, for Jack has painted it in a design very like that picture in that book where we found it—so he says. However, among savages, if a woman sees it she has to be killed, and the man who shows it to her has to be killed too, in case a flood drowns the world, so I had better not, and I only know it is painted by the smell, or when I touch it, for it comes off rather. Jack finished it and took it down to the cellar, where we keep it behind a wine-bin, but just as he got in he heard somebody coming, so he had to throw it down the steps and trust to luck. It was Dobson, carrying a light too, but fortunately he could not have seen it, as Jack found it later on hanging on one of the steps. I had another escape later on, for while I was in the cellar swinging the bull-roarer I discovered that auntie and Susan were prowling about all over the house long after they had gone to-bed. (Auntie never seems to go to sleep; I often hear her walking about, for she and Susan talk a great deal and make such a noise.) I should not have heard her this time, only I had had an accident in the cellar, and had broken a bottle of wine. I was tired, so I swung rather carelessly, and got too near a bin. Well, it made such a noise that I stopped and opened the door to find out if it had disturbed anybody, and then I saw a faint light up high near the servants' rooms, and so I hid the bull-roarer, and ran to bed. I think she heard me on the landing—I mean auntie, for it was she—because she said, "What is that?" but I got into bed quickly and she went on.

I do not think the servants like Aunt Olivia, for Susan and Jane are leaving to-day, and when I asked why, Susan cried and said she could not stand it. Dobson fell on the cellar steps and hurt his foot, so he is ill in bed.

I am sorry you can't make a bull-roarer, but I will help you when I go to stay with you next. I know you will like it, but you must promise to tell nobody, because, you know, it is a mystery.

Your loving cousin,

PHYLL.

EXTRACT VII.

MY DEAR LUCILLA,—You are so sympathetic, and I find so little of that precious quality here, that I again turn to you. Yesterday cook came to me, looking very grave, and said that, by Dobson's request, she had been down to the cellar, and there found a bottle of wine broken. Dobson was sure this was not done on his last visit before his accident—on that occasion, of course, he was unable to examine anything. Someone has been there, but who? Neither cook nor I,

certainly, and I would not even have the children questioned for fear of alarming them, poor things!

Last night cook and I searched the house before retiring to rest, and then I endeavoured to compose my mind, having arranged that if I heard anything I should ring the dinner-bell for cook, and we should at once descend, and search the house again.

I had been up about ten minutes, when, whirr! whirr! it began, louder than ever, and cook joined me, and we went down. On reaching the landing we met Phyllis, who asked anxiously what was the matter. I was grieved to have roused the dear child, and wished I had not rung so vehemently. I replied vaguely that all was right, and begged her to return to bed, which she did, raising her eyebrows in a puzzled manner. In talking to Phyllis, we had lost some valuable time, and though we searched even to the cellar (where we found a bottle of wine again broken—freshly, as it seemed, for the wine was running across the floor—and the door, contrary to all orders, unlocked) we found no one. Cook suggested that the bottles were broken by rats, but, as I replied, that did not explain the noise.

After another fruitless search we went up again, but this time cook remained with me, and we arranged a more careful plan. Directly the whirring began again, which it did almost immediately, we looked at one another, and very quietly descended. I do not think I was ever so much afraid in my life, and cook was ashy white. When we reached the foot of the stairs the sound ceased, but we had not quite crossed the hall in the direction of the library when it began again. As we passed the cellar door, cook noticed that the key was in the lock, and with much presence of mind she turned it. As she did so, the sound ceased again, and we were passing to the library, whence the noise appeared to come (for we dared not examine the cellar, though secretly we both *felt* some presence there), when a heavy body was thrown against the cellar door, with shouts and cries and even kicks, so startling us that we fled upstairs, and clung together, scarcely knowing what we did. What was to be done? Dobson could not stir; we were only two helpless women, so we decided to leave the burglar shut up till next morning, and then send for a constable. Accordingly, we went to my room, for I would not let cook leave me, but the cries and bumps of our captive allowed us no peace of mind. I began, too, to fear that the precious children might be disturbed, so at last we went down, trembling exceedingly, to their rooms.

I went first to visit Phyllis, and what was my horror to find her gone! Her little bed was empty! Dear friend, my anguish of mind was terrible! I rushed to Jack, and rousing him demanded to know where his sister could be. He stammered, blushed and laughed, so I shook him vehemently, and he sat up in bed, and was about to reply, when he suddenly started, and said, "Hullo! What's that?"

and, before I could stop him, he was off downstairs, and cook and I running after him, saw, to our terror, that he was opening the door of the cellar. And from the cellar—I scarcely believed my own eyes—came Phyllis! Phyllis, my niece! Phyllis, with red eyes, and tumbled hair, and white face. Her teeth were chattering, her hands stained and bruised. I was struck dumb at the sight.

"Miss Phyllis!" cried cook. "Good sakes, what are you doing there?" "Confess at once!" I said sternly. "How dare you disturb us in this way? I shall telegraph for your father to-morrow, you naughty girl." "Don't be angry," she sobbed, now quite overcome. "I did not mean to disturb anybody. I only wanted to practise the *bull-roarer*. I can't help it, Jack; I must tell. Oh, I was so frightened!"

Well, I took her to her room, and there wrung from her a confession which astonished me more than words can say.

These children had been reading some nonsense in a book, I could not tell what, from her disjointed and tear-broken story, but this morning, when she had somewhat recovered, I obtained a fuller explanation.

I asked first if she were in the habit of going down-stairs frequently at night. She said "Yes," so I further requested her to tell me if she had anything to do with a strange, whirring sound I sometimes heard. She said she had, but had had no idea that any one could hear it, as she "always did it in the cellar." I asked what she did, and she said she swung the "bull-roarer." "And what is that, my dear child?" "Something the old Greeks used as a mystery," she said. "I would show it to you, only women mayn't see it." "That is great nonsense," I replied; "bring it at once." "Oh, no, please," she said; "if you do the world may be drowned." "Phyllis, you are a goose," I replied; "it is disgraceful that any sensible girl of eleven, in a civilised Christian land, can talk such rubbish." She looked at me pleadingly, but I was relentless, and commanded her to bring it at once. Then it appeared that this instrument could not be found, and that Jack had taken it. He would not speak to his sister, and was extremely angry with her for revealing their absurd secret (I told you that boy was obstinate and sulky), but I soon managed him, for I wrote out a telegram asking Tom to return. Of course I did not send it, but when Jack saw that I was in earnest he produced a curiously-shaped piece of wood, painted very badly to represent an Indian chief or some such-like barbarity, to which was attached a piece of string.

"Does this make such a noise? Be quite frank, my poor boy," I said. "I am not easily deceived." He looked at me indignantly, and before I could stop him, began to whirl it round by the string. Crash came some beautiful old Venetian glass, much prized by Tom and Mary. I flew towards him, for the noise had begun and was quite deafening; I received such a blow on the head as I shall be many

days before I recover from, and no longer needed any proof of the powers of this strange instrument.

I asked the children where they learned of it, and, from their incoherent replies, I gathered that it was from a brown book with silver letters, belonging to their father. "Silver letters" guiding me, I found a volume of the "Silver Library" in Tom's room, entitled, 'Custom and Myth,' and therein I found a very learned dissertation on the subject of this "Bull-Roarer," as the erudite author terms it. You, dear Lucilla, whose delight it is to pore over abstruse lore, and to unravel the mysteries of the condition of primeval man, would doubtless rejoice in this store of research, and I commend it to you. Meanwhile I find the instrument in question is an institution among savages at their barbarous religious rites to frighten away women (who, by their traditions, are not permitted to attend these ceremonies, or to view this instrument on pain of death), and to call the men to the meeting.

I was about to close this long epistle when, to my surprise, my brother suddenly arrived. He has decided to convey Mary into Switzerland, and before going has run over to visit us, and see that all was well.

His arrival is most opportune. Of course I have told him the whole story, leaving Phyllis and Jack in his hands, but commending them to mercy.

He is extremely angry at the breakage of the Venetian vases and the loss of three bottles of his valuable wine. "How could you be so clumsy?" he asked.

I must allow Phyllis is a very engaging child. She looked at him very prettily and faltered, "You know, Daddy dear, women mayn't look at it" (meaning the bull-roarer), "so I was all in the dark, and did not know I was near the shelf."

What nerves that child has! She actually went down all by herself in the dark, into that damp cellar at dead of night, and never even minded the rats. I fancy, however, I punished her pretty well by shutting her up, which is a good thing, as Tom is so weak with his children, and actually let her off with a mild scolding. Jack did not escape quite so easily; indeed I think Tom was glad of a pretext for telling him that he is to go to school in September.

Tom will stay on here until the end of the week, when I rejoice to say a new governess comes.

Tom has not been quite kind about my fright. He does not understand how I suffered; he also vexes me by his ingratitude, for he says his children are evidently too much for me. I did not reply, but I shall take some time before I think well again of Phyllis and Jack, who have caused me much annoyance. However, as their governess is coming, I shall have no great responsibility in future.

One stipulation I have made, which is that the "bull-roarer" shall be at once banished. Of course, I feel no foolish fear of it, such as

those poor benighted savage women are said to have, but I cannot bear to live under the roof with such a heathenish instrument, used for calling uncouth barbarians to I know not what dreadful rites. Wide-minded as you are, dear Lucilla, I feel that you are with me in this, and will not be likely to suggest that there may be a pious intention in their rude "mysteries," while the questionable fact remains of their excluding all the gentler sex from them, a fact which of itself undoubtedly points to no good. Farewell, dear friend.

Yours as ever,

OLIVIA MERTON.

EXTRACT VIII.

DEAREST MOLLY,—I am the most miserable girl in the world. Jack is to go to school, and he says it is all my fault for telling about the bull-roarer.

I had to tell, for Aunt Olivia locked me into the cellar last night, and it was all found out; and only think—she has heard the noise every time I have done it, and was awfully frightened. If she had only mentioned it I could have comforted her, but she says she was afraid of frightening Jack and me. "Your innocent little ones," as she called us to Daddy. He *did* laugh. "I think you are an innocent little one yourself compared with my two brats," I heard him say, for Daddy often talks in a very nasty way about us, only he does not mean it.

I broke some of the bottles with the yellow seal in the cellar; you see, it was so difficult to help it in the dark. Daddy says he will stop some of my pocket-money to pay for them, but he gave us each half-a-crown, so that is all right.

Jack has just come in and made it up, and says he is not to go to school till September, and that is months off, so we don't care much, and he says he will rather like it, he thinks, if Daddy will let him go to the same one as Roger Evans. It will be worse for me, but mother will be home by then, and Daddy says if we are both good he will take us out to Geneva in the holidays.

By parcel-post to-night I am sending you the bull-roarer, as Aunt Olivia made Daddy say we were not to keep it any longer. Mind, neither you nor Jessie must see it—it is much better fun when you don't.

Aunt Olivia does not *pretend* a bit well. She made us show it to her. I did wish the river had happened to overflow, for then she would have been frightened—she is far more easily frightened than I am. I really think she supposed I believed it was all true, but of course I only wanted to please Jack.

Your loving PHYLLIS.

A LARGE SKATING-RINK.
A TALE OF MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER.
BY THE REV. PREBENDARY VERNON.

I KNOW that this story has been told before, briefly, and without detail. However, having access and sources open to myself alone, of all humanity, I will tell it as fully and as well as I can. I believe the facts are authenticated, and I need not fear the reproof that one—well—a *story-teller*, received from a quiet guest, who, after having sat listening to adventures, the hearing of which might have made an oyster open its shell in amaze, then broke into the awed silence: "Ah, that is a wonderful story indeed. But I think I can cap it with something even more wonderful, from my own experience." The company (it was a dinner-party) shuddered in anticipation. However, the new speaker went on to "gently touch the warbling liar," in the following manner:

"I was," he said, "once captured by Indians. I was well known for my fleetness of foot, and had, indeed, on a former occasion, escaped from a couple of Indians in pursuit of me, by my fast running. My captors were, however, on this occasion, in force, and among them were the three great runners of the tribe. Preliminary to any other little plans they might have had for my comfort, they were sporting enough to propose to me a race for my life. You may suppose that I did not take long to consider the proposition. I was to have a certain start, being, of course, unarmed. My pursuers were also to carry no weapon, seeing that the tribe would naturally prefer to have my death a "linked sweetness long drawn out." So, to make a long story short, you may imagine the preparation, the gathered tribe of dusky peppermint-stick-painted devils; the runners in line; the start.

"I ran, yes, I *did* run, and soon saw that I could beat them all in pace. But—the forest-training told, after a time, against the white man, and I saw that the lightest and lithest of my foes was steadily gaining on me, having left the other two some way behind. There was but one thing to be done. I waited his coming up, and so, in great degree, recovered my wind. He came at his top speed, and with a wild whoop, but I eluded his grip, and throwing on him my whole weight, bore him to the ground, forcing his head backward until the scalplock met the spine. I had killed the foremost of my pursuers. But the second was perilously near, having, of course, gained in the delay, enraged at the death of his comrade, and fearful lest I should escape the vengeance of the tribe; he, as he drew nearer,

and I prepared to run, hurled at me a tomahawk, which, contrary to the rules, he had hidden in his belt. Quick as thought I caught it by the handle as it whirled in circles towards me, and springing lightly on one side, as he passed me I buried the little axe in my enemy's scalp. Thus I killed the second of my would-be captors. But the third had yet to be dealt with. I was breathless from the former encounters; he was close at hand; there was no time for deliberation; in an instant he was upon me; we fought—and——"

"You killed him too?" broke in one of the excited auditors.

"No, sir. *He killed me.*"

This silenced the first romancer, I believe, for the rest of that evening.

However, this anecdote is but as a savoury to relish the coming repast to which we will now betake ourselves.

Let me narrate the story in the words of the faded chronicle of many years ago.

* * * * *

I, Gerald Burtleap, finding England, even in the days when I was young, overcrowded, set forth, with three companions, to make for ourselves a home and a farm in the virgin soil of the Far West. We were all four University men, athletic, and with some book-learning, but we did not favour any one of the professions; we did not care to be tied to a desk; and agriculture was too commonplace, monotonous, and vulgar, in the old country, for our fastidious tastes.

So, with no letters of recommendation, we set out for the younger country, well provided with implements, outfit, and pluck, and, the sea-voyage over, plunged into the prairie. How long will it remain, in the coming years, as we then saw it? Herds of bison—some day to be extinct, as "civilization" in its march destroys wild men and beauty—large herds of deer; and these moving in an interminable flower-garden. "The most variegated carpet of flowers we ever beheld lay unrolled before us—red, yellow, violet, blue—every colour, every tint was there; millions of magnificent prairie roses, tuberoses, asters, dahlias, and fifty other kinds of flowers. Our horses could hardly make their way through the wilderness of flowers. We passed beautiful islands of pecan, plum, and peach trees, entwined with the vine and carpeted with soft and beautiful verdure. At night myriads of fireflies issued from these islands, and spread themselves over the prairie, their small blue flames lighting up the plain, as though with Bengal fire."*

However, with compass and chart we went on and on, further and further from the habitations of men, through the interminable prairie, until we saw gleaming before us, on the horizon, a vast sheet of water. This assured us that we were nearing our destination, and our spirits rose accordingly. Here we meant to erect our small wooden castle,

* "Adventures in Texas." Tales from Blackwood.

and while the ground was being got into order, the gun and the fishing-rod would keep us from starvation. We had brought some stores, of course, but we wanted as few encumbrances as possible, and we meant to dispense with the nuisance of servants; it would be hard if our own stalwart arms could not fulfil Adam's heritage, and if our courage and caution could not guard our heads. We had a good armoury of the new rifled gun, that would carry far beyond the smooth-bore hitherto in vogue; fowling-pieces also, and cases of pistols, plenty of ammunition, and—with a view to the winter days—that which proved, in the end, to me at least, the most valuable of all the outfit—several pairs of the best skates.

The part of the country in which we were settling was reported to be free from Indians. However precaution was necessary, and the first thing we did was to raise our castle. This was a comfortable habitation within, surrounded by degrees with a stockade of mighty piles, sawn out in the wood hard by, and carried on wheel-skeleton-trucks to the place of their requirement. Our barricade appeared to be, when we had finished, impregnable, with its cunningly devised loopholes, etc. Barrels for store of water were provided by the empties, after our stores were unloaded. Dried meats, etc., would form our commissariat in case of the very remote contingency of a siege.

The cattle and most of our heavy goods had come by water, together with a staff of workmen to assist us in our start. With these we effected the principal building of our blockhouse and stock-hurdle, and the breaking of a sufficiency of the rich virgin soil; and then, retaining only two of the most energetic and reliable, dismissed the rest. We hugged ourselves upon the delight of the prospect of our romantic life, far away from the busy hum of men, untrammelled by the fetters of conventionality, enjoying the calm reasonableness of friendship—far better, we contended, than the mad frenzy of love. It was a wild scheme, so we had been warned, but we laughed at caution and, self-reliant, scorned the idea of danger.

An old tale, and often told, of the young—but, let us hope, not with so terrible an ending as that which closed the last chapter of our experience.

A year had passed by—a year of hard work, no doubt, but yet of thorough enjoyment. It was delightful to see the ready and magnificent response of the virgin earth; the superb crops, the luxuriance of vine, of maize, of all vegetation. For the cattle there was unlimited fodder; our orchards and our orange plantations were all hopefulness itself; there was the pride and pleasure of, as it were, feeling the boat give to every stroke of the oar.

Then the whole prairie was our flower-garden; in our tight little craft with its trim sail we could make excursions, and, at a station on the shore of the lake, obtain what further stores we needed. And though it was very many miles away, we could mix, if we pleased,

occasionally with others of our kind ; procure bundles of newspapers which we perused at our leisure, when the evenings grew long, and glean news of what was going on in the old world. For fishing there was the lake, abundant with the finny prey. For sport there was big game for the rifle, and feathered game for the guns.

And so we went on, for a year or two, in fancied security. We neither saw any Indians nor heard any report from our occasional visitors and recipients of hospitality (always ready for the stranger in the backwoods), of there being any within dangerous proximity to our new home. Our farm flourished, our cattle increased, the virgin earth ever responded with willing harvests to our wooing, our precautions against enemies seemed unnecessary.

Well, our security proved in the end to be utter foolhardiness, and further temerity and scorn of advice brought upon us fearful retribution.

It is probable that our flourishing settlement, insignificant in its infancy, came to be talked about. However this may be, rumours somewhat disturbing began to reach us from chance visitors, of Indian trail having been seen in parts hitherto unvisited by Indians. And one day we were startled out of our equanimity (as was Robinson Crusoe by the impress of a human foot on the sand of his lonely island), by the appearance at the verandah of our dwelling-house (a lighter residence than the "castle," as we called our stronghold) of an Indian brave of the Sioux tribe.

He came with no war-paint, or appearance of hostility, and we received him as we would any other guest. We gave him hospitality, and though we feared lest his visit might be that of a spy, yet it seemed best and wisest to betray no distrust or apprehension. However, upon his departure we carefully looked over our fortification, replenished its stores, and brought in an ample supply of pure water. Of course the castle was our armoury, and we kept all things always ship-shape and in preparation. Also we added to our number a practised scout, renowned for his swiftness and *savoir faire*, and prepared a beacon upon an abrupt peak, not far from our camp, whose fire could be seen for a vast distance across the lake.

It was in the autumn that our Indian appeared, and as we saw and heard no more of his tribe, we settled down from our anxiety, and concluded, although our precautions were never relaxed, that there was really little to apprehend. We were, ere the end, to be very rudely undeceived.

It was late winter, and for some weeks an intense bleak frost had prevailed ; the lake was a sheet of thick ice, the wild animals were tamed and cowed by the cold, and fell ready victims to our guns. We passed away the time pretty comfortably, with sport in the day, and good log-fires in the long evenings ; being well-victualled, and freshly provided with new bundles of old literature from home. So, day after day passed, and nothing came for a while to vary the

monotony. A quite sufficient "sensation" was, however, very near at hand.

One evening our scout came to us with an unusual gleam of excitement upon his imperturbable face, and informed us that he had come upon Indian trail. He had gone on the track, and had come to the conclusion that a considerable number of braves, evidently upon the war-path, had approached ominously near to our settlement. By his advice we locked our summer-house, removing our special treasures to our castle, and therein took up our abode. It was evident, however, that the house could be used as a cover by the Indians, if they should come (concerning which we were still sceptical), and thus become a source of much annoyance and danger. So, directed by our man, we placed in it some kegs of whiskey, and buried under the floor, so as to be commanded from our fort, a choice mine of powder. We possessed a small piece of ordnance, which we trained direct upon our mine; rifles were loaded and laid handy; six-barrelled pistols, also, and short swords, if it should come to a hand-to-hand encounter.

And now we felt secure enough, for we made no doubt that we could hold the block-house against almost any numbers, until our beacon, which on the first alarm our scout would fire, should bring to our aid a sufficient reinforcement from the town.

Well, they came. Stealthily in the night had they surrounded our farm, excepting only on that side bounded by the frozen lake. By some unaccountable fatality, the scout, usually so wary, had been thrown off his guard, and the blood-curdling yell from at least forty Indian braves was the first intimation we received of our terrible situation.

There was, in the area about our castle, little or no cover, except that of the summer-house and farm-buildings. Advantage had, however, been taken of these, and from every point and coign of vantage there came, with daybreak, a fusillade of musketry. Unfortunately the buildings were near enough to the block-house (an oversight of ours) to make the fire, even of the smooth-bore musket, dangerous and annoying; and there were among the Indians marksmen well-skilled in the use of these weapons, as the bullets told us that from time to time sang through the loopholes. Then, also, we were deprived of the advantage of the long range of our rifled guns. However, during the first day no casualty occurred on our side, whereas two or three of the enemy, incautious or impatient, had fallen victims to our vigilance. We had no sufficiently favourable opportunity, on this first day, of springing our mine. We hoped that, towards evening, a carouse might set in, and our little surprise come off. Then, under cover of that, we hoped that our scout would safely elude the blockade, and fire our beacon. This should bring on the ice reinforcements within twenty-four hours.

It avails little to tell the story at length. For some days the siege continued, with no decisive result, but with some loss on either side. So good was the aim of one or two among the braves, that our superiority in weapons was greatly neutralised, and our two helpers, whose rashness we had in vain endeavoured to curb, had fallen victims to their hardihood.

We had, with our small cannon, wrecked the outhouses, etc., but yet, even so, these made a cover of which our foes availed themselves only too well. Our summer-house we left untouched, save for rifle bullets, until the occasion for which we were waiting should come. How it was that our whiskey-trap had, so far, failed in its attraction, we could not divine. Whether the chiefs had set guard over it as a precaution, or with intent to a monopoly, we could give no guess. Rushes, under cover of night, had been attempted, but the block-house was impregnable against all but cannon, and our pistols were, at close quarters, deadly with their revolving barrels. Indeed, we were threatened with a new danger from the bodies, which, contrary to Indian custom, had been left, as it seemed of purpose, lying close to our castle, gruesome witnesses of our success we dared not sally forth to remove. However, while the frost lasted, this would not hurt us. Our shingle roof rendered arrows wrapped in lighted tow entirely harmless. Still, so closely were we beleaguered, that our scout had found it impossible, hitherto, to escape with a view to firing the beacon, and this was to us a matter of most serious import. Already we had lost two of our garrison, and, in the end, it seemed likely numbers must prevail.

However, on the third night of our siege, we seemed to perceive the opportunity for a double *coup*.

Under a misty moon we had noted dark forms flitting from the scattered points of cover towards the summer-house. In the dim light, and with the swift and stealthy movement, sudden and not to be calculated upon, the rifle was of little or no use. Still, we fired, partly to allay suspicion of the master-stroke the moment of whose arrival we were awaiting with hearts whose beating we could hear. A red-hot ball was prepared: the gun we had trained, by means of marks previously made, on to the precise spot. We waited until the dark flitting seemed to have ceased, and sounds of savage merriment to be increasing in the house. It may be that, hitherto, suspicion had kept them aloof. But this was the third night, and nothing had happened; apparently, then, they had thrown caution to the winds.

With trembling care the ball was rolled down the adamant lips of the cannon, resting upon a thick wad, and confined in its place by another. The gun was trained in the marked groove, the match applied. Short and sharp was the answer from the gun: terrific the uproar from the mine we had prepared, an explosion beyond anything upon which we had calculated: we must have deposited at least six times the needed quantity of powder! A mighty roar, a

volcano of fire, Indians and limbs of Indians, together with beams of wood and rendings of earth hurled up to a vast height, and falling, after a minute of appalling silence, all about the blockhouse. The slaughter must, indeed, have been terrific; but, alas, our scheme had proved only too effective. For our own castle reeled and tottered under the force of the explosion, and great rents appeared in it.

The blockhouse was no longer secure.

We trusted, however, that the enormous disaster to the foe would intimidate them, and that there might be a respite for a while; for their numbers must have been, since the siege began, vastly reduced. Our hope was that our scout, who had swiftly dashed from our stronghold while the dreadful catastrophe was at its zenith, would certainly be able to elude the watchers, and to fire the beacon, in which case we might be able, by the mercy of God, to hold our own until reinforcements should arrive. How earnestly we watched, with what tense eagerness we waited to see the tongue of fire tower high above the beacon hill!

We waited for what never came; we waited for that we saw never. Lower and lower sank our hearts into the depths of despair. I learnt afterwards that the cunning Indians had placed a guard actually within the materials of the beacon. Our poor fellow entered straight into their trap.

So the morning dawned upon us, forlorn. As we had anticipated, no attack was made upon our fort during that day. The Indians seemed paralysed with the greatness of the blow which had struck down so many of their warriors, and, I afterwards heard, their most famous chief. Vainly we tried to repair the rents and breaches which the terrible explosion had made in our tower. Death now stared us in the face. We could but commit our souls to God in prayer, and determine to fight to the last, and by no means to be taken alive by these incarnate demons, as they almost seemed to be. The tortures which, with exquisite delight, they inflicted on their prisoners, had often been recounted to us by travellers, and their fiendlike enjoyment of suffering, and utter absence of ruth.

The very success of our *coup* would bring upon us the extreme of vengeance and of torture from these Sioux, of all the Indian tribes one of the most cruel and merciless. This we knew, and we resolved accordingly.

Our *coup* had, in fact, proved, save as a matter of revenge—which was not in our creed—entirely a failure. True, we had left but a remnant of the first band of our enemies; but on the day but one after the explosion reinforcements had come into the Indian camp.

This we saw, and might have gathered, indeed, from the exultant yells with which their advent was greeted.

So, on the second morning, we gripped our rifles, placed spare pieces and our pistols beside us, loaded our cannon, ate what was likely to be our last meal, commended, for the last time, we felt, our souls to our Maker; and prepared for the worst. No

surrender; no being taken alive; thus we sternly resolved. We had but three cannon-balls left; we fired them into the cover whence the most of the yelling had proceeded, and where there seemed to be a meeting of warriors, preparing, as we supposed, for the attack. But presently we perceived that some preliminary function was being entered upon. A mass of the débris had been placed in a pile, and close to this there had been fresh upturning of earth; and yet a strange round object, that seemed possessed of life, lay on the fresh-turned mould. What could it be? We were not kept long in doubt. A burning brand was thrown into the dry heap of wood, and as the flame crept subtly through the heap, a terrible cry burst from the round thing on the ground, a cry to us, an appeal for help. Then the horror flashed upon our mind. The round object was the head of our poor scout, his body being buried (no doubt, tightly bound beforehand) in the earth! Help, help—what help? What could we do? The fire was creeping on, the intolerable torture would soon begin. Should we rush upon the enemy, leaving our fortress, and attempt a rescue? But if this we did, we should not cross, alive, half the distance between our castle and our poor friend.

At last the meaning of his appeal came upon us with appalling distinctness. "Fire, fire!" he was shouting. "Put me with a rifle bullet out of torture!"

Dare we do it? To take life, with the thought lingering with us, "While life is, there is hope!" Yet the flames crept on; rescue seemed impossible. Praying to be forgiven if wrong, we fired, two of us, at the same moment, and cheated the Indians of their devilish delight.

This was the signal for the expected rush. A rush it was, incited by baffled rage: also the enemy doubtless calculated on the hurry of our aim. For the reinforcements had been considerable, and some thirty painted devils, with cries that might have echoed through the halls of hell, rushed in a semicircle upon our doomed citadel. It was soon over; our rifles accounted for four, our pistols close at hand for yet more. But in a few minutes my three friends lay dead and scalped on the field; and I—yes, I was in the hands of the Indians!

As I clubbed my rifle for a last blow, suddenly strong arms from behind were knit around me, pressing my arms to my sides, and in a few minutes more I was tightly bound, hand and foot, and in the merciless power of these painted monsters! Horror of horrors! There was no kindly rifle ready to do me a good turn; and upon me the furious vengeance would be wreaked of the tribe, for the many warriors the fight had cost them. Hope there seemed none, save from prayer. No earthly friend was near, and, except to end my life, no one man could have availed aught. Our beacon had failed—there seemed no hope! Yet the old proverb, beautiful and true, came once to my mind: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." And even this, in the end, it proved.

I was not painfully bound, and I was treated, so far, well; fed and cared for. Alas, I well divined the reason! No doubt I was to be carried to the Indian village, and there to undergo the refinement of torture of which I had often shudderingly heard.

And, indeed, on the day after our last disastrous fight, it was evident that a move was intended. Our household goods and utensils were handled and curiously surveyed, by the Indian warriors, and every movable carefully packed for the journey. Of pots and pans and the like, they could well enough guess at the use. In our clothes they ludicrously dressed themselves, using under-garments for upper, and nether for super. But over one find there was incessant palaver, and ever-growing curiosity. So much so, that, at last giving up the riddle, the party assembled around me, and exhibited to my gaze several pairs of the best skates.

A flash of hope shot through my breast. The chief, who had picked up a little English, was spokesman.

"Brudder, what these?"

I explained, as well as I could, and emphasized my words with dumb show. Still, of course, they were as far as ever from an idea of the use to which the strange objects could be applied. So I kept pointing, as well as my loose bonds would permit, to the thongs which bound me, and intimated that, if free, I would show the Indians the use of the mysterious implements. But to this they said:

"No, no—brudder run away."

I again indicated my cramped limbs and pointed to their supple members, also to their guns. "Indian shoot if white man run." And now hilarious laughter took the place of the demur, and "Yes, yes!" the place of "No, no!" "Yes, Indian run! Indian shoot! Good white man!" A little more palaver, and then—oh, my dry lips and beating heart!—then the bonds were loosed, and the skates placed in my hands.

I affected to be more cramped and stiffened than I really was, and limped with apparent difficulty to the brink of the big water, which stretched before us, one vast sheet of polished ice. With care and seeming effort, I bound on the skates, and then, with all the apparent clumsiness of a tyro, began to slip and sprawl upon the ice. Whether the Indians thought this the right thing, and a kind of game, or whether my clumsiness and falls amused them, I know not. This I know, that amid their uproarious merriment I wept as I rose, and totteringly skated a little, to fall again and again, steadily increasing my distance from the edge of the lake, and its fringe of Indians. No idea had they now of any need for caution; only a few among them carried guns: I was, to them, much as the poor mouse that, half dazed, the cat securely suffers to creep farther and farther from her on the lawn. But sometimes there may be a hole near, of which the baffled cat knows nothing.

Well, the merriment—and the distance—kept increasing, until at last my heart-beat almost stopping my breath, I felt that the moment had come. I fell once more, and then fumbled with the skates, as though in vexation with them for my ill success. But I bound them more tightly on to my feet, rose once more, tottering and seeming helpless, to my feet, and *then*— Off like the wind on the glorious glassy sheet, a free man. Off like the wind, and the shadow banks on my right seemed spinning in motion. Safe, free, was I? No, hardly yet. A wild yell of rage rang out from the shore; I feared not any pursuit; not the swiftest runner could have a chance with my skated feet. No, but a stray bullet might lame me—and, sure enough, ping, ping, they came, spinning along the ice, wide of me, eager, on this side and on that. I would not, to dodge the aim, zig-zag in my flight—no, I kept right on. Did ever skater speed so fast?—fleeter, faster than the wind. And, as if just to assure me of safety, at the last a spent ball feebly struck my skated heel, rolling against it not smartly enough for even a bruise! I could scarcely hear the whoops and yells of the easily distanced Indians. I could think over my most marvellous deliverance, and adore, from my inmost heart, the great Preserver of men.

There was anguish in my soul at the thought of my friends. Could they but have escaped in like manner! But such a thing could not have been foreseen, and they had, at least, died fighting, whereas my fate would have been one too horrible to contemplate. So on and on I sped, thinking I never could place miles enough between myself and my subtle foes. On and on, having no compass, but expecting, when evening should fall, the guiding of the stars. Strangely and most happily, I had, in a deep pocket, remains from the provision for some old excursion, hunting or the like, some dried pemmican and some biscuits; and there was the ice. Also I found stowed away a small flask half full of brandy.

Night fell, but I dared not rest; on and on I must speed, guiding my course now by the starry heavens. Excitement kept me going; and when rest I must, I would rest in daylight rather than at night. And, the dawn appearing, I found myself close upon a small island, and here, landing, I determined to seek the rest that my now overpowering fatigue imperatively demanded. The excitement of fight and of flight had in some degree worn off, and tired nature insisted on attention to her requirements. So I landed, and found among the reeds at the water's edge, most unexpectedly, a nest of some wild fowls, whose eggs made for me a most welcome repast.

Profoundly I slept, for hours, and woke, at last, with a start, to find the sun sinking in the heavens. Dazed and confused in mind, it was some time before I could realize where I was, and what had befallen me. When the mind's ripples settled into smoothness, and I understood and remembered—I wonder whether ever before, on that

lonely island, there had gone up prayer, worship, to the Father of spirits. Surely never any so earnest as was mine. And there was cause.


Well, my troubles were not yet quite over. On one occasion I had to go far out of my course—or that which I judged to be my course—to avoid a long crevasse or creek of water that divided the ice. In the daytime I would diverge, as the stars told me when night fell, from the line I ought to have taken. On one occasion I was the quarry for a pack of wolves, and their hideous yelping and howls behind me made me doubt as to whether, in England, the poor hunted deer or fox really enjoy the “sport,” as the huntsmen declare they do! However, I was swifter than the wolves, and left these also behind. Once I coasted an island, from which, to my horror, a tall spire of smoke arose into the still air. It might be an encampment of white men; but then it might be Indians. Fast, fast I sped on, until smoke and island were far away out of sight.

The silence, all this while, was almost oppressive. The silence, as I sped on, of the listening woods that fringed one side of the lake; the silence on the wide lake itself; the silence above, of the calm serene sky; the oppressive silence of the star-lit heavens.

Scores of miles I must have gone out of my way, and day after day passed, and I wondered whether I should last out to reach the colony I was seeking. However, the end came, and—ah! the joy when I saw in the distance the canopy of smoke which told of human dwellings not far away. Then it was, however, that with renewed intensity there came upon my mind that I alone out of our little colony had escaped, and I bemoaned the folly which had sacrificed, so recklessly, these young bright lives.

Wonder and most hearty welcome greeted my entrance into the town, and with breathless interest was my story listened to.

The usual result of such over-strain and over-fatigue followed. I was for weeks laid by, unconscious, in a most serious illness. When I recovered, I shuddered to hear that a party of volunteers had gone out from the colony the day after my return—that the Indians had been taken by surprise, and not one single man of our murderers had gone back to his village to tell the tale.



FOLLY OF WOMAN.

BY CONSTANCE SMITH, AUTHOR OF "THE REPENTANCE OF PAUL WENTWORTH," ETC.

"SERIOUSLY, Eve, you don't think of going to the Orde-Lauristons' to-morrow night?"

"Quite seriously, my dear Betty, I do." Mrs. Allonby smiled languidly from among her sofa cushions, and drew the fur rug thrown over her closer, with an involuntary shiver.

"But—but ought you to go?" Betty Holmwood murmured diffidently. She was only twenty; Eve Allonby represented to her girlish enthusiasm the sum of all feminine perfection; in impugning her idol's wisdom she felt herself perilously near committing sacrilege. "Remember, on Monday you could scarcely lift your head from your pillow."

"And to-day is Thursday, and I am virtually quite well. I cannot consent to be made an invalid of any longer, whatever you and Dr. Carmichael may say."

"I shouldn't have imagined," Betty said ruefully, "that you would have cared so very much——"

"About one of Eleanor Orde-Lauriston's crushes? Oh, if that only were in question, I'd willingly stay at home! But there is Walter. I hate disappointing him; besides, he really ought to put in an appearance at this party. All the political people will be there."

"Can't he go without you?"

"You know he never cares to go anywhere without me"—reproachfully.

"I know. Still, I should think——" Betty checked herself suddenly.

"Ah, you think many things!" Mrs. Allonby half laughed, half sighed. "Wait till you've been married five years, my child. Then you'll understand that your husband's fancy for having you always with him is not one to be trifled with. Also, that if a woman wishes to keep a man's comradeship, to be his friend of friends, she must prepare to wage war with feminine laziness. No man will put up with a comrade who 'falls out' whenever she becomes the least little bit footsore."

"It's the man's business to call a halt as soon as she feels tired," Betty declared.

"And the woman's, if she's wise, to prevent his guessing that she does feel tired," Eve retorted. "I often marvel at the folly of wives whom I overhear boring their husbands to death with the tale of their

petty ailments. In my own case—but perhaps you may say that mine is an exceptional case”—flushing painfully. “It is, undoubtedly. When the balance of age lies so much on the wrong side——”

“My dear Eve,” the girl protested hastily, “surely you needn’t take that point into consideration! To begin with, you look years younger than Mr. Allonby. Everyone says so.”

Betty’s exuberance of feeling occasionally found vent in a corresponding recklessness of speech. But in her present desire to console, she was not guilty of rhetorical exaggeration. No unprejudiced observer, setting Eve Allonby—still, at four and thirty, combining the slender grace and delicate colouring of girlhood with that higher and deeper beauty to be found only in the face of the woman who has thought, and loved, and sorrowed—beside the man who entered her morning-room as Miss Holmwood left it, would have supposed her his equal in age, much less his elder by a round half-dozen years.

Walter Allonby was one of those heavily handsome men who cease to look young before they have well put off the schoolboy’s jacket. At twenty-eight he might easily have passed for thirty-five—an exceedingly comely thirty-five, be it understood. Tall, broad-shouldered, straight of limb and hard of muscle, with a fresh complexion and placid ox-like eyes, Eve’s husband might have sat appropriately for a picture of the trueborn Englishman of a certain type and class—the class which dresses faultlessly and fares sumptuously every day; the type which, happily conscious of blamelessness in all works of the law, contemplates life habitually through the smoked glasses of a perfect self-satisfaction, thereby blurring its perception of many facts that, more vividly apprehended, might ruffle its serenity and impair its appetite.

Mr. Allonby, on leaving Oxford, had been called to the Bar; but he had never attempted to practise. Having a sufficient private income, he could afford to indulge at once his dislike of drudgery and his ambitions—which lay in the direction of a political career. A promising speaker and good man of business, he took pains to make himself useful in both capacities to his party. And “the party” had lately acknowledged his services—by recommending him to an East Anglian constituency which had no candidate of the right colour in reserve against the forthcoming General Election.

Just now—between nursing this constituency, extending his social connections (he held that, to the furtherance of his larger ends, it was highly important he should “get on in society”), and indulging in those healthful sports which, as he was fond of telling his rural audiences, “have made Englishmen what they are”—Mr. Allonby had little time to spare. It was unfortunate that Eve—a model wife, who seconded him with unflagging zeal in all his schemes—should happen to be laid aside at such a juncture. Besides, her usefulness apart, he missed her hourly companionship. No one else understood him so perfectly, sympathised so completely with his aims,

or watched with so keenly attentive an eye the effect of his speeches—or his boundary drives—on a critical crowd.

"Better? Really? Quite yourself again?" he inquired anxiously, coming up to her sofa. "That's right! Then you won't be afraid to attempt the Orde-Lauristons' to-morrow?"

"Not a bit!" Eve responded, sitting up bravely. She had thrown off her furs and raised herself from her recumbent position as soon as she heard her husband's step.

"And I can let Holroyd know that he may expect us on Monday?"

"Monday? I thought the stone-laying at Marpleton"—Marpleton is the chief town of that county division for which Allonby hoped shortly to write himself down member—"was fixed for Wednesday?"

"So it is; but Holroyd has arranged for me to play round the Marpleton links with Naylor on Tuesday morning, and he thought I had better have a walk over the course first. So Monday was suggested."

"I see. How would it be if I joined you at the Holroyds' on Tuesday, then? Of course, I must be there for Wednesday's ceremony——"

"But you'd like to go round with the match, wouldn't you? And there's no morning train that would get you there in time. We start at eleven."

Mrs. Allonby suppressed an inclination to laugh—possibly one to sigh also.

"Oh, in that case it had better be Monday for both of us!"

"Very well. I'll send Charles to the post-office with a wire at once. And, Eve"—pausing in the doorway—"could you get up a little impromptu dinner on Saturday, do you think? Just eight people or so—to meet Mallinger? I know he'd like to come."

"The thing is difficult; but it shall be done," quoted Mrs. Allonby, nodding her husband lightly out of the room.

It proved difficult—in another sense than that in which Eve had spoken or Walter understood the word. Mrs. Allonby did not know, till she took pen in hand, how absurdly weak that "slight" attack of influenza had left her.

"The demon is playing havoc with my nerves—after his accustomed fashion, I suppose," she thought, on finding herself ready to weep because she had directed two envelopes upside down. "But he sha'n't have the better of me; I won't give way!"

And she did not give way. She appeared in Mrs. Orde-Lauriston's crowded rooms the following evening as brilliant and gay as resolution and one of Rose Feuillet's most successful creations could make her; thus arousing the virtuous indignation of Mrs. Cotterell, her husband's aunt.

"The way young women nowadays—and especially young married women—spend their lives (and risk them) in the headlong chase after

amusement is positively shocking, to my mind," this excellent person declared to old Lady Holmwood. "Look at my nephew's wife!" She nodded fiercely towards the corner where Eve, smiling over the posy of hothouse flowers with which Walter had presented her "on her return to the stage," was holding three men in talk at once. "At the beginning of the week she was in bed, with a doctor looking grave about the state of her lungs. And there she stands—with the thermometer twelve degrees below zero—tempting Providence in a low-necked gown!"

"A very pretty gown," Betty's grandmother commented approvingly, turning her head and her long-handled glasses in Mrs. Allonby's direction; "and particularly becoming to Eve. Except that she is a trifle pale, I have never seen her in more charming looks."

Could Mrs. Allonby have overheard this flattering expression of opinion, her mind—much tormented by doubt on the subject of her personal appearance—might have found rest. As it was, her secret anxiety betrayed itself in a hasty appeal to Betty:

"What do you think of me?"

"The frock's a dream!" Betty responded with heartfelt enthusiasm.

"Oh, the frock is well enough, I know!"—impatiently. "But I—I myself? Do I look like the death's head at this feast of reason?"—glancing, with a faint curl of the lip, along the range of overthronged rooms in which a number of suffering men and women were engaged in practically demonstrating the compressible quality of the human body, and trying to look as if they found the process agreeable. "Am I fit to appear among my fellows?"

The words were light. But the speaker's eyes hung on Betty's for an answer.

Betty was highly reassuring. "You are exquisite. Just like a spray of white lilac—or stephanotis. But, oh, Eve, I wish you were at home, away from the heat in here and the draughts outside. Promise me, at least, not to stay late?"

Mrs. Allonby touched the girl's arm caressingly with her fan.

"You foolish, tender-hearted child!" (There had been a suspicion of tears in Betty's pleading voice.) "I promise—on the faith and honour of a gentlewoman. As soon as Walter has done with Sir John Mallinger—a mere candidate must needs be patient with an ex-minister, let him be never so prosy—we will depart. I daresay they will have had their talk out in another five minutes."

Mrs. Allonby underrated the charms of political conversation. Sir John Mallinger's further comments on the position of national affairs and the prospects of Mr. Allonby's return for the Marpleton Division of Loamshire occupied fully a quarter of an hour; and his retirement only left Walter free to cultivate the good graces of other distinguished persons who happened to be present. Not till it was growing very late indeed did he find himself at leisure to propose taking his wife home.

By that time Eve was frankly tired out. She had some difficulty in not falling asleep as soon as she found herself in the carriage. But Walter was in a talkative mood. So once more will triumphed over weakness.

"I suppose you saw Arthur Chaloner?" he remarked, when the sayings and civilities of Sir John Mallinger and his colleagues had been sufficiently discussed.

"Across the room only. I thought he looked out of spirits. Was Mrs. Chaloner there?"

"No. She's laid up with one of her many maladies—so I understood from Chaloner. Poor beggar! I'm awfully sorry for him; that woman's a perfect millstone about his neck. He can't even ask a friend to dine, because she's 'not equal to seeing people!' Of course he is dropping out of notice in consequence. An invalid wife plays the deuce with a man's social career."

Here Eve, who had stretched out her hand to shut the carriage-window, drew it back abruptly.

"To say nothing of all she costs him in fashionable doctors and German baths. You don't object to that window? Right—the fresh air is good for you after those stifling rooms."

Mrs. Allonby did her best not to shiver in the freezing blast euphemistically described as "fresh."

"Mabel Chaloner looked very ill when I saw her three weeks ago."

"I daresay! The last time I saw her—that must be three months since—she had become a perfect hag. And I remember her quite a pretty girl! But this is what comes of that abominable sofa-and-brougham system you women take to so readily. I beg your pardon, Eve! Thank Heaven, you never inclined to be hypochondriacal!"

Mrs. Allonby laughed faintly at the fervour of her husband's tone. "I shook off that influenza pretty quickly, didn't I?"

"Because you behaved with spirit, and refused to shut yourself up—just to please old Carmichael. I wish he could have seen you to-night! Do you know that Karakoff was asking for an introduction to 'that very distinguished beauty in white' just before we left? There's a feather in your cap!"

Eve laughed again. But during the next few days, amidst all the discomforts of that relapse which followed necessarily upon her act of imprudence, she recalled the pride with which Walter had quoted the Russian diplomatist's flattering epithet, and congratulated herself that she had 'made an effort.'

When Prince Karakoff met her again, five months later, he was less lavish of admiration.

"*That* the lovely Mrs. Allonby of last winter?" he queried, shaking his bald head mournfully. "You surprise me! On my honour, I should not have known the lady again."

It seems that, given a heart and lungs which have been "touched" by the influenza-fiend, a regimen of party-giving and party-going,

of golf-playing over wind-swept links and stone-layings in driving sleet, may work as sorrowful havoc with the patient's good looks as that sofa-and-brougham course so uncompromisingly condemned by Walter Allonby.

Walter Allonby's wife recognised this truth, yet she continued the regimen. She continued it, because she durst not, for her life, flag in that arduous business of keeping step, lest her husband should remember that she was six years older than he.

Remembering that miserable fact always herself, having it continually before her mind, she watched her beauty fade with daily-increasing terror—terror of the fatal moment when Walter, in whose own eyes she could already discern puzzled disapproval of her changed appearance, should read in the eyes of others that his wife was become a plain, sickly, *passé* woman. His position, as an embryo politician without great wealth or great connections, was not such as to compel social consideration for her. Such modest success as she had won in the great world was due (she knew it) to her own fair face and bright wit. Now both these weapons of attraction had failed her at once (it is so difficult to be amusing when all one's energies are absorbed in doing battle with physical weakness!), and society, carelessly cruel, was beginning to show its consciousness of her losses.

When, at a certain great ball, three successive blank spaces confronted her on her programme, she knew that the hour of doom was ready to strike.

Desperate, she turned from those significant blanks to look up into the face of a tall soldierly man standing near, demanding, in her most winning manner:

"How is it that you haven't invited me to tread a measure with you to-night, kinsman?"

Major Everard started, and his grave face paled under its layer of sunburn. Of late years he had grown chary of asking his cousin Eve to dance with him. She had never, even in girlhood, suspected the nature of his feeling for her, never divined the existence of that silent, selfless devotion which he kept so carefully hidden in the most secret recesses of his chivalrous soul. Yet was he scrupulous in the matter of offering her attentions which he would have paid without thought to any other woman.

"I—I didn't suppose you would condescend so far," he stammered. "I'm not a first-glass performer, you know."

"It's so long since we danced together, I really can't place you!" Eve smiled back. "Let's have a trial turn now."

Once, twice, they floated round the great ball-room. Then Everard felt his partner's fingers close convulsively upon his sleeve, and heard her whisper hoarsely:

"Get me out of this place—quick! Somewhere quiet—where people won't see."

Mechanically—feeling her weight grow every moment heavier on

his arm—Everard made his way out of the crowded dancing-room and through a short gallery into the conservatory beyond. There Eve fell into a chair, panting and speechless.

Terrified by her ashen face, and the ominous blue line round her drawn mouth, the man looked about him distractedly—divided between fear of leaving her and anxiety for help. She beckoned to him reassuringly with a fluttering hand.

"It's nothing. I'm a little overtired; I shall be better—presently. Some water—from the fountain!"

He espied an empty lemonade glass on a neighbouring table, brought the water in it and wetted her forehead liberally with a dripping handkerchief. Still the piteous struggle for breath went on. "I'll call someone," he muttered; and would have started off but for her eager cry of:

"Don't do anything of the kind! I want no one! If you bring anybody here I'll never speak to you again! See, I'm nearly well already!"

He paused, afraid to stay, still more afraid to go in the face of that passionate appeal. And gradually her breathing became less laboured, her pallor less ghastly. At the end of five minutes she sat up, saying quite cheerfully:

"That's over. Poor Tom! What a nuisance for you! I do hope"—with a quick frown of anxiety—"that Walter didn't notice. Was he in the ball-room when we came away?"

"I think—not."

With a sigh of relief she began putting the little damp curls on her forehead into order.

"My hair feels as if I'd been in the sea. Really, Tom, you might have had more regard for my appearance."

"I never thought about your appearance at all," was the Major's blunt answer. "And I suppose it doesn't much matter—of course you'll go home now?"

"Not at once. I don't want to spoil Walter's evening."

The Major bent his brows.

"Was it for his pleasure you came here to-night?"

Eve sprang at once to arms.

"For my own, I'm afraid—principally. I love dancing; I'm a perfect child where a ball is in question. By the way, Tom, you undervalue your powers. I'll give you the third and the fifth at Lady Holmwood's to-morrow if you like."

"You mean to go to another dance to-morrow?" said Everard, appalled.

"Most certainly; why not?"

"Why not?" Everard's tone was more than half angry now. "Because you are totally unfit for this life of hurry, and fatigue, and excitement. You look ill; you are ill—we have just had abundant proof of that. If you go on in this fashion, you will do yourself some

serious mischief. What has come over you? When you were a young girl in your first season, you could give up parties philosophically enough. And now—now——”

“Now that I am old enough to know better, I will not forego a single evening’s amusement, you would say?” Eve had grown very white again; her lips were quivering. “Even so, sage moralist. You see, I’m painfully conscious that, being so old, I shall have few more opportunities of dancing, and must needs make the most of those that remain.”

“Even at the risk of killing yourself?”

“Have you never heard of a short life and a merry one? You needn’t trouble yourself to assume that disapproving air, sir. I don’t mean to sink into an aged invalid before necessity compels me, just to gratify prudent persons like yourself!”

In such airy fashion did she bear down his arguments—being indeed, for the moment really gay, since had not this business of “the attack”—she never gave it any more definite name—tided her safely over those terrible blank spaces? She insisted on returning to mingle at once with the crowd; and when Betty, an hour later, ventured a low-voiced remonstrance, grounded on her friend’s air of suppressed suffering, she was repulsed with:

“My dear, it’s not civil to tell people they are too ugly to be abroad. If I had a cough which disturbed the company’s peace of mind, I would retire at once.” (“Thank heaven! my ailments have never taken such tangible form!” she thought to herself.) “But in this free country I presume a woman may be permitted to look as ill as she likes.”

When Major Everard stepped out of his hansom at Lady Holmwood’s door the following evening, he felt certain—miserably certain—of finding Eve among her guests. There had been strong and serious purpose underlying his cousin’s light speech. Something—very far removed from reckless love of pleasure—was driving her remorselessly upon this suicidal course which he, and every other human being save one, stood powerless to arrest.

Dance music was sounding as he crossed the hall; but just as he reached the foot of the staircase it ceased, sharply, suddenly, in the middle of a bar. And his first sight of the ball-room on the upper floor showed him no array of ordered couples, but a veritable mob of black-coated men and bare-necked, bejewelled women pressing towards a doorway at the further end, with subdued exclamations of:

“She’s dead!” “No, no—it’s only a fainting fit!” “Heart, I suppose; she looked appallingly ill at Preston House last night.” “Is her husband here?” “Not yet; coming on later.” “Someone ought to send for him.”

With scant ceremony, Tom Everard elbowed his way through the swaying, murmuring throng into the little room—draped and shaded to a soft gloom for “sitters out”—where, on a heap of cushions,

Eve Allonby lay white and motionless. An elderly man—a great physician who had brought his daughters to the ball—bent over her, holding her left wrist in his fingers. Lady Holmwood, pale and shaking, was at the head of the couch; at the foot knelt Betty, crying helplessly.

As Everard, walking like a man in a dream, came close to the group, the elderly man drew back, with an ominous shake of his grey head; and the still figure on the cushions, stirring slightly, opened its eyes. Stooping in his turn, the Major caught the old pitiful whisper:

"It's nothing—overtired. I shall be better—presently."

A pause followed—a moment long as an hour to the man whose own heart seemed to stand still in breathless waiting. Then the pale lips moved again—for the last time:

"Don't let—my husband—know!"

"Poor thing, she courted her fate! Her folly was positively criminal. She *knew* from Dr. Carmichael—whom it seems she had consulted without telling any of us—that her heart was all wrong. And yet on the day of her death she rode in the Park, went to Sandown with her husband, and dined out somewhere—before coming on to the Holmwood dance! Of course one feels immensely for *him*; but it's difficult to be very sorry for a woman who deliberately threw away her life—for the sake of a few parties."

This is Mrs. Cotterell's verdict—generally allowed to be just by the majority of Eve Allonby's acquaintance. Allonby himself, while missing his wife terribly, cannot altogether shut his eyes to the recklessness of the behaviour which deprived him of her; in him, too, a recognition of her folly has done something to soften the edge of grief. There are, however, a few soft-hearted persons—among them Major Everard and little Betty—who, all her errors notwithstanding, find it easy to mourn poor Eve. And these give that "folly," rightly condemned of their less indulgent fellows, another and a gentler name.

"WAIFS AND STRAYS."

THEY sat in the busy office
And told, as such children do,
Of kin unkind, "Now mother was dead,"
Of how they were hungry and wanted bread—
And we looked at the eldest's curly head,
And asked her, "How old are you?"

There came back a strange, sad answer
To fall from a childish tongue—
"The baby, you know, has gone to Heaven,
But Molly is six and Dick is seven,
Teddy is three and I'm eleven,
So you see we're none of us young!"*

Four little homeless outcasts!
We sent them all away,
And now in the meadows, beneath the trees,
'Mid the song of birds and the hum of bees,
Kind hearts that cherish such lives as these,
Have taught them at last to play!

But still in our teeming cities
Though the highways be paved with gold,
Do they not wander with aimless feet,
Children whose childhood was never sweet,
Stifled in alley and crowded street—
Hungry, neglected, cold?

Woe, men say of the Nation,
Whose king has not reached his prime;
Yet is there a sadder thing to see
When the children—the Nations yet to be—
Have forgotten their innocent mirth and glee,
Grown old before their time!

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

* Words actually used by a child under like circumstances.

